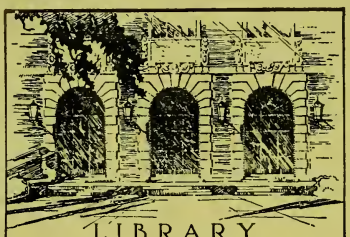

DOCTOR VICTORIA.

A PICTURE FROM THE PERIOD.

BY
MAJOR-GENERAL G. G. ALEXANDER, C.B.

"Fiction is a fabric woven by Fancy with threads of Truth."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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Gratefully Inscribed

TO

SARAH BECK HARVEY,

WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND RARE GIFTS

HAVE BROUGHT ME SO MANY

HOURS OF PLEASURE.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

DOCTOR VICTORIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE END OF A SHORT LIFE.

"Its flight was upward:
Let no cynic say
It was not heavenward.
What! that one poor ray,
Because it wandered—
Hapless went astray—
Is gone for ever,
Quenched and cast away
In endless night!
No! it were false;
For Perfect Love stood by,
And gave His aid
To guide its path on high."

THE rays of the setting sun stream through the mountains which form the northern and southern shores of the beautiful lake of Thun, and light up with a roseate glow the glorious

group of snow-clad peaks of which the Jungfrau is the queen. The day is dying, and never, never could its beauty have been greater, more wonderful, than now. Brighter and brighter, higher and higher, that heaven-born blush moves onward, upward, till, all aglow with golden light, the highest point retains it lovingly, then loosens its embrace, and cold, pale hues spread stealthily o'er all, and tell of night and darkness soon to come.

In a chalet under the Nieder Horn, perched high above the lake, the last flush of departing life had lighted up and brought back all the beauty—aye, in the presence of the sanctifier Death, all the purity which belongs to innocence and youth—to a dying girl.

A girl in face and form, but yet a mother, for a sleeping babe lay folded in her wasted arms.

Her bed had been so placed by the open window, that the full glory of this her last earthly sunset was spread out before her; but it seemed as if she did not dare to gaze upon its beauty, for she had turned away her head from it. And as she now lay, with her cheek pressed against the slumbering babe

upon her bosom, she, from time to time, gave a little low wail, which spoke of mental agony too deep for words.

It was a little low wail, but low as it was, it attracted the attention of the only other person in the room, who rose from her seat—she did so with difficulty, for she was very lame—and drew near the invalid's bedside.

"Violet, you must be calm."

The speaker, whose naturally harsh voice seemed softened by emotion, was a person approaching middle age, with a pale and anxious face, bearing traces of many trials and much sorrow. To have judged from the expression of her mouth alone, it might have been concluded that those trials—whatever their nature might have been—had hardened her character and made her utterly unsympathetic to the wants and feelings of others; for it was one of those mouths which, though it would not have been without beauty in a man, had a stern determination about its every line—whether in movement or at rest—which took away from it every trace of that indescribable, though well-defined, sweetness of expression which is one of woman's most charming characteristics.

But if the harsh lineaments of her mouth

repelled, there was a depth of tenderness in those dark-grey eyes which revealed a warm and loving heart.

Two distinct and opposite natures seemed to be united in one person.

It was impossible to look at those eyes and not think of what she must have been in youth, or at that mouth without being reminded of the hardening effects of the lessons taught by age.

"Violet, you must be calm."

The soft grey eyes were dim with tears, but the voice seemed hard even to harshness.

"The doctor says that if you would get well, you must keep quite quiet."

"Aunt dear, I shall never get well. I am dying."

The stern mouth quivered; it was but for a moment.

"My child, there is still hope. You are young. The doctor tells me you are only weak, and that you are free from all disease."

"But one—a broken heart!"

There was no hardness about the mouth now, and even the tone of the voice was softened:

"Hush! My poor Violet, you must not speak like this! You must live! You must

try—to live! If not for your own sake, for the sake of this poor child!"

There was something in the last word which seemed to renew the failing strength of the dying girl.

"My child! my child!" she said. "My curse! my shame! Oh that I had died before its birth!" Then, encircling it more closely in her arms, and raising its little hands to her lips: "My beautiful—my precious one—why did I give you life? Oh, it was shameless! —a cruel, cruel wrong! But who had thought a man could be so base? Ah, coward! monster! What! forsake your child?" She was silent for a moment. Then, softly, as if in supplication: "O God, forgive me! I was so young and weak—so young and weak. Why didst Thou let it be? Sweet Jesus, pity us, and take us both—my child and me —I dare not come alone! She shall protect me with her innocence. Yes, I am guilty, but I do repent. Oh, save me! save me! Ah, His touch is cold—so icy cold! It is the hand of Death!"

Then, as if exhausted and worn out by the exertion she had made, she shuddered convulsively and hid her face in her hands, as if to shut out some hideous object.

The hard, stern mouth was closed more firmly than ever; it seemed pitiless even to cruelty, but the dark-grey eyes were suffused with tears.

For a time the ticking of a clock, on a table near the door, was the only distinct sound; then the silence was broken by an occasional little bleat, which showed that the slumbers of the sleeping babe had been disturbed, and that it would soon awake.

Again the sick girl spoke—this time slowly and calmly, with longer intervals between her words.

"Marmaduke," she said, "you will not leave me—'twould break my heart—I know you will not leave me! No—no!—you are too good—too kind! Did I not give you all? My love!—I had no more—and this poor little life!" Then, raising herself on her pillow, she stretched out her hands imploringly: "Marmaduke, you must not go! You shall not leave your child!—it is *your* child!" Her voice had become loud and piercing; in an instant it subsided into a low wail of despair: "What, gone? gone? Deserted in my need? Oh, who shall hide me—save me —from my shame?"

She fell back upon her pillow, and seemed

to sleep, notwithstanding the shrill and passionate cries of the now wideawake infant, who resisted every effort made by the owner of the dark-grey eyes to soothe it. But they had the effect of bringing another actor upon the scene.

It was a young woman in the dress of a peasant, who, opening the door quietly but quickly, hurried up to the screaming child, and endeavoured to soothe it by her caresses.

"You do not well," she said, in the peculiar patois spoken in the Bernese Oberland—"you do not do well to let the mistress talk. I heard her high-toned words. She, the good, gentle one. And this poor lambkin, too, has lost her sleep."

So saying, she took the infant in her arms, and singing, only as loving nurses can sing, laid it upon her breast.

She sang so softly, it was difficult to catch the words :

"'Hush thee ! oh, hush thee !
The angels are singing.
To my white one, my wee one,
A crown they are bringing ;
A crown of bright stars
Fresh plucked from the sky.
Hark ! the angels sing softly ;
Sleep, sleep ! God is nigh.'"

The eyes of the infant were again closed in sleep, and as the nurse rocked it backwards and forwards, the clock seemed to tick more loudly, as if to mark the cadence, whilst she sang, again and again:

"'Hark! the angels sing softly;
Sleep, sleep! God is nigh.'"

The roseate glow was passing from the mountains, as Margaret Marsh—she of the dark grey eyes—knelt by the side of the dying Violet; and as she pressed her lips—tender now as her eyes—upon that pallid cheek, a tear would not be restrained, but fell upon it.

"Violet—dear Violet!"

The tear—it fell before the words—seemed to bring back the ebbing tide of life.

"Aunt, dear!" the voice was scarce a whisper now, "don't cry. I have been very weak and wicked. If I had not been so weak, I had not been so wicked. Forgive me!"

"From the bottom of my heart, my child."

"Promise me."

"What can I promise?"

"To love my poor child as your own."

"I will give her all my love. She shall be the child of my old age."

"Do not let her be weak, like her mother.

Let her have a good name—not Violet. Call her Victoria—after a good woman and a good queen. Aunt dear, I die happy. Kiss me."

The last ray from the setting sun had leapt from the highest peak, and as it did so, it seemed as if a chill had passed through Nature's heart, so pale and wan the shade which fell upon her.

So too had the last hectic flush of life passed from the cheek of the dying girl: a few incoherent words, "It is dark!" "So dark!" "Marmaduke!" one deep-drawn sigh —and yet another spirit was released from its earthly bondage, and Violet Marsh had ended her short life.

At the same moment, whilst earth hid her face in the gloomy shroud of night, one solitary star rose rapidly above the Jungfrau's snowy screen. It was but a lone star; but as its silvery rays fell on that fair face, making it shine forth as the face of an angel, to the mourner by the couch, as she turned her eyes to heaven, it was more than a lone star—it was a messenger of peace from the Eternal.

CHAPTER II.

TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

TWENTY years have passed away since the events in the last chapter. Twenty long years! How difficult to realise what those few words mean!

Change upon change — a never-ending substitution of the new for the old! And yet the stream of time rolls on so silently, that to those who float down it, it often seems as if it had neither currents nor motion.

Change upon change! With no two incidents of our lives alike; those of the Past producing a Present never to be renewed.

Change upon change! The Future flying before us in our youth, and hastening to meet us in our age.

An eternity of changes, with but one eternal law—to change.

And so our scene has changed. We are

no longer amongst the mountains of the Bernese Oberland, we are in the midst of the roar and movement of the great metropolis. We are in London.

A fine soft April day. In the Parks the trees are beginning to bud and the grass to grow. Everywhere Nature is casting off her russet garb, and as she does so, those who live in the country regard her changeful moods with anxious thoughts for the future fruits and flowers. Here in this great, grimy, smoke-stained city, Spring brings other cares; for nowadays, all that we do is done so seriously, that even our daily pleasures are made to assume that form.

It was half-past three in the afternoon, and the sun, which had shone out somewhat brightly in the morning, was now peering through the spread of yellow smoke and fog which in London is the usual afternoon substitute for sky, when a continuous roll of carriages announced that Fashion was abroad, and about—according to the old phrase—"to take the air."

Poor Fashion! who, when it is the season, must be content to take such air as the cold east wind, mixed with the city smoke and river fog, may chance to give her.

But now the wind was from the west; and if there were any fog few people observed it, for during the last few months they had seen little else.

Amongst the many carriages which oscillated with pendulum-like precision between the extremities of that portion of the Park which Fashion has seized on and sanctified as her own, there was one which stood out from all its competitors—for there is competition now in all things, even in carriages—so that it could not fail to attract the attention of the most casual observer. Yet it was only a brougham, drawn by a pair of bright bays with plain black harness, and a coachman and footman in simple dark liveries. But though nothing could have been more unostentatious than the whole turn-out, no one could see it without feeling that it was an æsthetic success.

"A nice turn-out that of the Yorkes."

So said the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps, late of the Guards, to Major Decimus Fitz-Jones, late of the Greys, as they walked slowly side by side, with that air of contemplative dejection which is one of the most striking peculiarities of masculine loungers in the Parks.

"Yes. Good steppers, and a perfect match. I positively believe——"

What the major's belief at that particular moment may have been, remains a mystery to this day; for the word "match" had no sooner been uttered, than the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps—commonly called P. P. by his intimates, and by some who were not his intimates, behind his back—exclaimed with unwonted animation, for he prided himself on his *sang-froid:*

"How much do you think they are worth?"

"At least four hundred."

"My dear fellow, you are too absurd! I meant the girls—not the horses."

The gallant major was about to reply, but it seemed fated that on this day his brief utterances—Fitz-Jones was always brief—were doomed to be interrupted; for he had scarcely delivered himself of one of those deep gutturals with which languid men about town are wont to call their words together and set them up in sentences, when various exclamations and an excited movement in the crowd gave evidence of something unusual having taken place.

Turning quickly in the direction of the

spot towards which the attention of the public seemed to be concentrated, the cause of the excitement became evident.

The carriage with the bright bays had driven on until it had reached that portion of the line where from time to time the mounted policemen on duty, with that imposing air common to all who exercise authority, from an admiral of the fleet to a custom-house officer, waved back the advancing carriages, and brought them to a sudden stand. Directly this was done a stream of pedestrians was graciously permitted to move on, and under another policeman's protecting care to effect a crossing, through dangers which, without his aid, would have been only inferior to those of a passage through the "pack" in the Arctic regions.

The deaf old lady and her nieces from the country, who on such occasions always manage to be last, had just completed their frantic charge, and reached the opposite side in a state of breathless exhaustion; the policeman had given the signal, and the bright bays who led the line, as if to spite the coachman, had answered his intimation that they were to go on by a playful plunge, when a young child, whose friends had

arrived at the crossing just as the embargo on the carriages was taken off, rushed into the road, and before anyone could prevent it was apparently entangled in the horses' legs, and in another moment would have been trampled under their feet, but that through the horses rearing, partly from fright and partly from being pulled back upon their haunches, a short respite was given from what seemed all but certain death.

A cry of terror came from the bystanders; but, as frequently happens when prompt action is needed, everyone, including the child's friends, seemed to be perfectly paralysed.

Fortunately, however, there was one exception. A tall, well-dressed girl sprang forward, and seeing at a glance that it would be impossible, from the position of the child, to stoop down and lift it up before the horses were upon her, she seized them by their heads, and with an exertion of strength which seemed marvellous from so slight a form, swung them round, so that their fore-feet came to the ground clear of the child, who was taken up all but unhurt.

A sound which seemed almost like a sigh

of relief came from the crowd, followed by loud cheers.

"A monstrously plucky girl!" exclaimed the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps.

"Knows how to handle a horse," chimed in the major.

It was the highest compliment he was ever known to pay—even to a man.

In the meantime she, whose courage and presence of mind had led to such a happy result, was endeavouring to escape from the overwhelming expressions of gratitude with which she was greeted. She had bent down and kissed the now weeping child, and was on the point of turning away, when a livery servant—the footman of the carriage—came hurriedly towards her, and touching his hat respectfully, informed her that her ladyship—Lady Arabella Yorke—desired to speak with her.

A shade of annoyance flitted across the young lady's face; it was but momentary, and she followed the servant without remark to the carriage, which had been drawn up by the side of the rails, a short distance off.

Lady Arabella Yorke, its occupant—the wife of Mr. Yorke, the richest of rich brewers, and most respectable of men—had lost no

time in making herself acquainted with the details of the accident, and having assured herself that nothing serious had occurred, sent her footman in search of the young lady whose action in the matter had been pronounced by her ladyship's coachman as "stunning."

Lady Arabella's carriage had been surrounded by a small circle of sympathising friends; amongst whom were the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps and Major Fitz-Jones, and the conversation had become animated.

"I shall never drive in the Park again," said Lady Arabella. "This has been a scene, and I hate scenes. Children should not be allowed to come near our public drives."

"I wish you could have seen her," said the Hon. Pierrepoint Phipps. "She was magnificent. As she stood before the horses she reminded me of a—of a—beautiful Grecian statue."

"She knows how to handle a horse," remarked for perhaps the thirteenth time the major; for it was no easy matter for him to get rid of an idea when it had once seized hold of him.

"Do you know who or what she is?" asked Lady Arabella.

No one seemed to know more than that she was young, and tall, and ladylike, and good-looking.

They had just commenced discussing whether she might not be this or might not be that, when the near approach of the subject of their discussion produced a sudden silence. All eyes were turned inquiringly towards her, but curiosity was changed into astonishment when Lady Arabella—whose near sight prevented her from recognising anyone at a distance—greeted the stranger as an acquaintance, and in a tone which clearly showed that the meeting, under other circumstances, might not have been a particularly agreeable one.

"Victoria! Good gracious, child! is it you? How can you be so thoughtless?"

"In what way?" asked the young lady, with a quiet dignity which rebuked the patronising petulance of Lady Arabella, though she spoke so calmly that it seemed as if she did not think it worth her while to resent it.

"You might have been killed! Oh, Victoria, Victoria! when will you learn to act like other people and think of yourself? You really are too eccentric. Besides, it is not

right that you should be walking in the Park alone."

Lady Arabella's friends had bowed and walked on at the young lady's approach, yet it was not without a blush that she replied curtly :

"It is the shortest and best way to where I am going."

"But you should not go out in London by yourself. It is not *comme il faut.*"

The young lady had resumed her usual manner, and there was something of playfulness in her smile as she said :

"Walking is not always a matter of choice, and I certainly should prefer an escort if I could find an agreeable one."

"Since you are going in the same direction, I will drive you across the Park."

With a bow of assent—it almost seemed as if she did not realise that she was receiving a favour—the young lady stepped into the carriage.

"Stop near the Marble Arch," was the direction to the footman as he closed the carriage-door.

"A friend of the family's?" asked the coachman—who had only been a short time in Mr. Yorke's service—of the footman, as

soon as the latter had reseated himself on the box.

"Yes," said the footman. "She lives down in Middleshire, and is often at our place."

"Lots of pluck. What's her name?"

"Her name is Marsh — Miss Victoria Marsh—but we always call her amongst ourselves Miss Vic."

CHAPTER III.

"HOME."

LADY ARABELLA, with scant courtesy—for her temper had been ruffled, or, as she would have expressed it, her "nerves had been shaken"—took leave of her companion at the northern entrance of the Park.

The short drive had been one continuous lecture, and she had talked herself into such a state of exhaustion that when the footman touched his hat inquiringly she could only gasp out the word "Home!" and fall back upon the pillows, which were always specially arranged for her support.

Poor Lady Arabella! She too has had to pay the penalty which would seem to belong to wealth and rank and fashion—a weak back.

"Home!" The distance is not great, and it does not take long before the order has

been obeyed. Lady Arabella has reached her home.

A large house in one of our largest squares. One of those localities where the senses become oppressed by the weight of wealth which is exhibited on every side, and through which the poor man cannot pass without asking himself how it is that he has escaped being rich.

One of those localities which fashion favours and calls "good;" in which is brought together a crowd of people who are not only placed by fortune in a position which has spared them all those trials, humiliations, and heart-burnings which belong to poverty and form part of its heritage: but are enabled to gratify every taste, however noble or ignoble, and make all that is beautiful in art or applicable in science, minister to their enjoyment.

To some the sight of this may be an incitement to exertion: what others have done, they too may do. "Excelsior!"

And the success of the few is made a rule of encouragement for the many.

But to those whose lot has been cast in the lowest depths of destitution, the sight of this superabundance of superfluities but serves to

intensify their misery through the contrast which it presents to their own sufferings. The sight of Paradise can bring no joy to those who are in Hades. Benevolence forgets this when it doles out its aid, and charitable people are shocked to find that there is so deep a gulf between the two extremes of poverty and wealth that even sympathy can scarcely bridge it over.

But Lady Arabella has reached her Belgravian home, and a loud rat-tat-tat has informed the neighbourhood of her having done so. On the instant the double doors fly wide open; two tall powdered footmen hasten forward to unroll a carpet so that the passage between the carriage and the mansion may be made undefiled; two more, equally tall and powdered, stand motionless on either side of the entrance; the footman who has been out with her ladyship is at his post, ready to open the carriage-door; a page is to be seen at the foot of the staircase; whilst in the distance, mounted some few steps above him, looms, in a graceful attitude, expressive of expectation, another model specimen of over-fed humanity. The other servants had been chosen for their height, good looks, broad shoulders, and big calves,

but the groom of the chambers, Mr. Mortimer —his enemies basely asserted that his real name was Chunks—belonged to that superior class who are required, in addition to those personal advantages, to possess great discrimination, unfailing gravity, and undeniably good manners. All these were possessed by Mr. Mortimer in a very high degree: and were it not that his grammatical construction was somewhat peculiar, and that the letter H had been a source of trouble to him from his youth, he might easily have passed, amongst strangers, as a university man who had come out in honours—Oxford, not Cambridge—or even in his happier moments as a Privy Councillor, or an ex-Cabinet Minister.

It is doubtful, however, whether Mr. Mortimer would have felt flattered had the latter mistake been made. He had once walked across the park behind the, then, Prime Minister. He returned in a state of virtuous indignation.

"Mr. Cox," he said, to the butler, "I am hignorant, and I know it. Had I been heducated"—his difficulty with his aspirates was chiefly in the long words—"I should not have been what I am, and there is no knowing to what I might not have rose to. I do

not know much, but this I do know, that if her Majesty were to make me the Prime Minister of this great and glorious country, I would act in a proper haristocratic manner, and I would not disgrace myself, nor demean myself, nor lower myself by a-walking through the Park in an old pair of boots a-busted at the sides. It made me sick to see it."

Meanwhile, Lady Arabella has managed, with the assistance of—including the coachman and the footman of the carriage—seven full-grown men and a boy, to effect an entrance into her own house, and is now once more at home.

But it must not be supposed that such an interesting spectacle had been without spectators.

The unrolling of the carpet had arrested the progress of a young man who was either not in a hurry, or else objected to wading through the mud round the carriage, and he soon became the centre of a small group, to which the inevitable baby in the perambulator, who would seem to be always on the watch for such opportunities, was hurriedly wheeled up. Thanks to the skilful generalship of his little sister who pushed him forward in a manner which showed she was utterly regard-

less of the fact that other people had toes, he obtained a front place, from which he surveyed the scene with a mingled expression of deep interest and the most placid composure.

What a strange world this world must be to babies! not unfrequently, when they look out upon it from their nurses' arms, it is not difficult to detect a tinge of pity in their large, wondering eyes.

There was one individual in that small group of spectators whose appearance was so remarkable, that he could not have been passed by without notice.

It was a gaunt, bent old man, whose threadbare suit of black had reached that painful state of shiny shabbiness which gives the idea of the wearers having endeavoured to coax back its original gloss by the application of some compound of an unctuous nature. It is possible that, in the first instance, the process might have been attended with a certain degree of success; but at the present time it was quite evident it had been carried too far, for there is a limit to all things, and with old coats, just as with old men and old women, a point may be reached beyond which revival becomes impossible, and any attempt to produce it only brings out

more clearly, and with a ghastly distinctness, the melancholy ravages which the wear and tear of time has occasioned. His hat was in perfect keeping with his coat; it had the same shiny, shabby, doubtful sort of look, and his well-patched boots were polished into a state which made any injurious comparison between the covering of his feet and that of his head impossible.

That he was extremely poor there could be no doubt. But that he had once seen better days was equally apparent, for there was an air of deliberation and ease about all his movements which can seldom be acquired, but which is natural to, and is rarely lost by, those whose early youth has been spent amidst the refinements of good society. Some of his old tastes, too, still seemed to cling to him, for he wore a flower in his button-hole—it was only a sprig of wall-flower—and though his gloves, like their owner, were very much the worse for wear, they were tight-fitting, indeed too tight-fitting, judging from the extensive repairs they seemed to have undergone—and were kept scrupulously buttoned.

A dejected, broken-down, miserable-looking old man, whose face was so full of sadness,

subdued by resignation, that he might have sat for a portrait of one of the early martyrs, had it not been that from time to time all expression passed away from it, and left nothing behind but a helpless, vacant stare.

He had arrived on the scene just as the carpet had been laid down, and stood quietly waiting for Lady Arabella to pass, when he caught sight of a small piece of paper on the pavement. It was only a small scrap, but he stooped and seized it with eagerness; his whole appearance was changed in a moment: his limbs trembled with emotion, and as he raised it to his eyes it almost seemed as if he had recovered some long-lost talisman which was to bring back the joys and pleasures of some happier time. Alas! vain hope. In another instant he had flung it away, and his former air of dejection seemed deepened by despair, as he muttered, in a low tone, again and again:

"If I could but find it! if I could but find it!"

When he had finished speaking he would have moved on, but one of the footmen kept him back, for Lady Arabella had alighted and was on the point of sweeping by. A flash of intelligence lighted up his wan and

wasted face as his eye rested, as if for the first time, upon the scene before him.

"Aye, aye," he said, with a kind of gentle bitterness, as if in answer to the footman's gesture; "you are quite right, my good friend, the poor Lazarus should not be allowed to cross the path of Dives."

The carriage has been driven off. The carpet has been rolled up, to the intense satisfaction of the baby, who is so carried away by his feelings that he thumps the sides of his perambulator and crows. The small crowd of spectators has dispersed, and he who spoke of himself as Lazarus has tottered feebly on.

The ceremonial has been completed. The doors are closed. Lady Arabella is "Home."

CHAPTER IV.

AN AFTERNOON "TEA" IN BELGRAVIA.

Mr. Yorke's house was a large one, and the architect who had designed it would have made the entrance-hall imposing if he could have managed it. He evidently had tried hard, but he had failed; instead of being imposing, it was an imposture.

The first impression on entering it was that it was too small; the next, that it was too large, for it looked so bare, and comfortless, and cold.

Perhaps this was greatly due to two life-sized groups of nude figures in white marble; beautiful, no doubt, as works of art, and agreeable objects to contemplate in a comfortable studio, or even in those countries where the sun shines so brightly, it gives rise to a sort of feeling that clothing might be dispensed with; but scarcely to be tolerated in

a climate where you can rarely take off your great-coat without a shiver.

Beauty may be charming to look at, but even beauty may be misplaced. What sight can be more melancholy than a marble Venus, whose white limbs have become green through the humidity of the public garden in which she stands, as if appealing to the benevolent public to subscribe and buy a blanket, wherewith to cover her nakedness.

But these statues had been brought from Italy. Mr. Yorke did not like to say what he had paid for them, and they were a source of great pride both to him and Lady Arabella.

To Mr. Yorke because they had cost so much money; to Lady Arabella because . . . well, it is hard to say; perhaps because she had been told they were beautiful. For it is very doubtful whether, after the first few days of their having been unpacked, she had ever looked at them.

But if the entrance-hall of Mr. Yorke's house gave rise to a sensation of cheerlessness, that feeling was dispelled the moment the foot was planted upon the stairs. The carpets were so thick, so soft, so yielding; they appealed to the senses like low, sweet notes, or gentle words. It was impossible to

tread upon them without being soothed and comforted. Mr. Mortimer, the principal portion of whose time—or at least that portion of it which was devoted to the performance of what he was pleased to call his "duties"—was spent in going up and down stairs, seemed to have found this out, for he had been once heard to say, when discussing, as he was very fond of doing, the conditions necessary to matrimonial happiness:

"No, Mary, no! Believe me, there can be no happiness without harmony, for where the tempers are hincompatible, how can the wheels of Cupid's car run smoothly on? But our tempers grow up out of our circumstances, and if men's hemployments and havocations are rough their tempers will be hirritable. Take my word for it, Mary; the seat of the temper is in the feet, not the heart; it is all easy shoes and thick carpets—hespecially the carpets. As for those hoil-cloths, and parkeys, and such like—well, don't talk to me about them, that's all, or we shall quarrel."

But it was in the morning-room where Lady Arabella reigned supreme, that the evidences were to be found of that refined and cultivated taste in small matters on which she so greatly piqued herself, and in

the indulgence of which she seemed to concentrate all her energies.

In this case it was impossible to say she had not succeeded. Here, no single article of furniture—however beautiful in structure or design—was allowed to appear, unless to fulfil some special object or intention. Here was to be seen no garish colours, no vulgar contrasts, no heaping together of expensive trifles, but a harmonious whole, to the effect of which even the most fastidious would have found it difficult to make objections. At the same time it would not be easy to explain why it was, on entering it for the first time, most people felt impelled to use the only word which seemed applicable to it—"Exquisite!"

In this room, at the moment that Lady Arabella reached her home, several ladies and gentlemen were assembled near a small table plentifully furnished with the most delicate of china cups, which were being filled and distributed by a tall, fair girl, who was evidently doing the duty of hostess.

"I do not think I will give you any, Sir Francis," she said, looking up archly at a dark, good-looking young man near her, "for you are so obstinate, and so disagreeable,

that really something ought to be done to correct you. You must be punished."

"No correction, coming from Miss Yorke, could be a punishment," said the gentleman she called Sir Francis, with a pleasant smile.

Miss Yorke raised her head and looked at the speaker, as if she were going to reply, but appearing suddenly to change her mind, she cast her eyes down again, and remained silent.

She was a tall, handsome girl, with fair hair fringed over her forehead; bright-blue eyes, and an expression so frank and open, that, combined with an unaffected manner approaching to carelessness, and sundry little eccentricities in dress, many people—judging from externals only—were led to the conclusion that Geraldine Yorke belonged to that category of young ladies who are usually spoken of as "fast." But if she at times spoke somewhat louder, with more decision, and with less deference to others, than was quite befitting in a young lady of her age—if she prided herself on riding boldly to hounds, or on being able to swim better than her brother, and could boast, as she not unfrequently did, of the skill with which she could "paddle her own canoe"—all this was

rather the effect of an exuberance of animal spirits which had been directed into no more profitable channels; and her fastness was of that guileless effervescent kind which belongs to the thoughtlessness of youth, and disappears before the realities of life and the matured judgment of age.

Very different the appearance of a pale, slight girl who sat somewhat apart from the others, and seemed to be more absorbed in her own thoughts than interested in what was going on around her.

Eva Yorke was nearly two years younger than her sister, but the quiet thoughtfulness of a face which still bore the traces of suffering inseparable from ill-health, gave her the appearance of being at least a year older.

Hers was a beauty which impressed less through the wondrous delicacy of features which might have been taken for a model by a sculptor, than from the singular purity of an expression which seemed as if it could only belong to one whose mind had been dedicated to the contemplation of high and holy things; but yet her thoughts could not have been devoid of sadness, for there was a tinge of melancholy even in her smile. Usually silent, when she did speak, there was a music in her

voice, and a gentleness approaching to tenderness in her manner, which was made the more striking by the contrast which it offered to the self-confident and not unfrequently defiant tone which seemed natural to her sister.

Yet Geraldine Yorke was not deficient in sensibility; it was, perhaps, the very excess of it which made her at times assume an indifference she did not feel. Often, too, it was when she was most attracted towards others, particularly if they belonged to the opposite sex, that she said and did things which were most likely to have an unfavourable construction put upon them.

It was impossible for two sisters to be more unlike; the one fair, tall, a model of physical development, full of independence and self-assertion; the other dark, slight, delicate, and drooping, with such a deep sense of her own deficiencies that she was, as it were, oppressed by it.

Yet Allegra and Penserosa—for so their mother, in her playful moods, was pleased to call them—were united so closely by the bonds of the deepest affection that their happiness seemed to depend on their being together. Their very divergences of character served

but to unite them, for the affections are full of enigmas, and we often love those best whom we resemble least.

Sir Francis Hawthorne, to whom, notwithstanding the threat of punishment, a cup of tea had been graciously handed, was a dark, sunburnt young man, whose age might have been anything between three-and-twenty and thirty, of middle height, with a strong active frame, and an air of quiet determination, which showed itself in everything he said or did, and would have caused him to have been recognised, in any part of the world, as an Englishman.

He was not strictly handsome, for his features were irregular, and his eyes were too close together, though they were not the less bright and pleasant to look at. He had a good mouth, white teeth—all the whiter, perhaps, from their being brought into contrast with a short, but soft, black beard— a frank unaffected manner, and an engaging smile.

The possessor of a large estate in Middleshire—not far from Mr. Yorke's country seat —to which he had succeeded a few years before, on the death of a grandfather by whom he had been brought up, his own parents

having died when he was quite a child, he had devoted himself, since he had come of age, to the management of his estate, and especially to the improvement of the condition of the labourers employed upon it.

Had it not been for his wealth, his agreeable manners, and his many popular qualities, it is possible that the extent to which he carried out his socialistic theories would have seriously interfered with his position in the county; as it was, the men only laughed and said: "He is so young. As he grows older, he will become wiser."

The ladies, however, especially those who had marriageable daughters, took a different view of what they called his eccentricities. They said:

"It is because he is a bachelor. He will become just like other people after he is married."

But he appeared to be in no hurry to marry, and to be more and more engrossed in the endeavour to reduce his theories to practice, when to the great surprise of everyone he suddenly announced his intention of starting on a round-the-world tour; and it was from this tour that he had only just returned, after an absence of more than a year.

He was still standing with the cup of tea in his hand, when Lady Arabella entered the room, with an air of complete exhaustion and a gush of words :

"Ah! My dear friends, don't move—pray don't. Sir Francis! What! Sir Francis! Can that be you? If I were not rendered incapable of it by what I have gone through, I should be astonished. How do you do? How d'ye do? Pray sit down. Ah! my dear children—Je suis éreintée!" Lady Arabella was rather fond of introducing French phrases. "Je suis éreintée! A drive in the Park is no longer possible ; it is now only fit for the people. Only imagine——"

And then throwing herself back in an armchair, without giving a sufficient interval between her sentences to allow of a single word from anyone else, she proceeded to give a minute and exhaustive account of all her feelings and sensations on discovering that a wretched little child had nearly been run over, and that she had narrowly escaped the painful notoriety of a paragraph in the penny papers.

"Only imagine, Sir Francis, how horrible! I shudder when I think of it. It really is quite time the Government should interfere."

She went on for a long time in the same strain; but though she mentioned, parenthetically, that she had been saved the disagreeable publicity she so much dreaded, through the child's having been dragged away by some one in the crowd, it was only at the end, when she had nearly talked herself faint, that she suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah! I forgot. And who do you think it was picked the child up?"

A dozen eyes looked up inquiringly. Sir Francis played with his watch-chain. One or two voices were heard uttering a timid—"Who?" whilst Geraldine broke in with a somewhat petulant—

"My dear mother, how is it possible we can know? I don't suppose it was anyone we have ever heard of."

"Tout au contraire. It was some one you know very well indeed. Imaginez! it was none other than that incomprehensible of incomprehensibles—Victoria Marsh!"

The name seemed to produce a degree of interest far beyond that which had been excited by Lady Arabella's account of her sufferings and dangers.

Sir Francis left off twisting and untwisting his watch-chain, and became all attention.

Eva drew her chair somewhat closer to the circle, and looked as if she had been suddenly awakened from a dream.

A young high-church curate, part of whose daily duty, in default of higher ministrations, was to assist at afternoon teas, became more serious and solemn than usual; whilst those who had previously never heard Victoria Marsh's name affected a curiosity they could scarcely be said to feel, as Lady Arabella repeated:

"Ma chère Allegra! Ma chère Penserosa! Imaginez! Victoria Marsh!"

"I cannot help loving her—she has such pluck; if it were not for that I believe I should hate her," was Geraldine's reply.

She spoke with such emphasis, it almost seemed as if she had stamped an accompaniment to the last word with her foot. Then, as if repentant—was it that she had detected the expression of deep pain which had flitted across Sir Francis's face?—she added:

"But love her, or hate her, I only wish I was more like Vic."

"May I be allowed to ask why?" said Sir Francis.

"Because—because, whenever I wish to be

independent and give myself masculine airs, I always feel I can never get beyond a poor imitation of a lubberly boy; whilst Victoria, without ceasing to be a woman, can think, and talk, and act with as much strength of mind and self-possession as a man. Oh, how I wish I had been one!"

"Woman's mission is a very sacred one," observed the curate.

"Oh yes! To make life endurable to your miserable sex—as I read somewhere only a few days since," was the retort.

"Mother," asked Eva, "did Victoria say when she was coming to see us? Has she returned to the hospital?"

"Of course she has," said Lady Arabella, in reply to the second question; and worse still—ma chère Penserosa, c'est terrible!—she told me it is now settled she is to be a doctor."

"How horrible!" in a chorus of many voices.

Geraldine looked indignant; Eva turned pale; and the curate was once more heard to say something about woman's mission. It seemed to catch the ear of Sir Francis.

"Yes, sir," he said, "you are right. Woman has her mission; but whether for men or for

women, that mission is the most sacred which seeks to minister to the happiness of others by useful work. I honour Miss Marsh for her resolve. You see, I am as eccentric as ever," he said laughingly, as he rose from his seat and held out his hand to Lady Arabella. "Allow me to congratulate you on your escape, and on your having met to-day with—what I have not seen in all my wanderings—a heroine."

As he left the room, he narrowly escaped upsetting Mr. Mortimer, who was about to enter it with a letter on a silver salver.

"Good gracious a-mercy!" muttered that gentleman, as soon as he had recovered his equilibrium, "our baronet is in a hurry. Bad form!—decidedly bad form! All very well for the working-classes; but when a man is a baronet, and has twenty thousand a year, there is no call for him to run against people, and rush about like a hoperative."

CHAPTER V.

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE.

HAD the question been asked of those who were best fitted to answer it: "Of all the men of your acquaintance, which is the one who has been the most favoured by fortune?" there is little doubt but that a chorus of voices would have answered: "Mr. Yorke."

For was not Mr. Yorke one of the richest amongst rich men? Was he not the owner of the fastest yacht, the master of the fleetest hounds, and the possessor of the best shooting in the three kingdoms? Was he not, too, supposed—of course under a feigned name—to have been almost as successful on the turf as his firm had been in the brewery? And outside all this, how fortunate he had been in his domestic life! A marriage of affection into a noble family; two charming daughters, and a son who gave promise of exhibiting in

an eminent degree all those respectable qualities by which the various members of the great firm of Souseman and Soppit had been distinguished for so many generations.

Who could be said to be fortunate if Mr. Yorke were not?

Mr. Yorke was still young, for he was little more than five-and-forty, but he looked older than his age; and it was difficult to imagine that he had ever looked differently, for he belonged to that class of men who always make you feel they never could have been boys. Bankers and lawyers generally have this look, and it belongs to most men on whom has devolved all the responsibilities and cares which belong to the employment of a large capital. Indeed of all men the rich capitalist, who has not retired from business, is the one who becomes the soonest "grown over with the moss of age."

He was an only son, and had been educated at Eton. There his character had been such as belongs to respectable mediocrity; in his classes he usually took a middle place; in all outdoor amusements he was a useful fag; and he was only redeemed from being looked upon as a "muff" by his reserved disposition and well-filled purse—for a boy generally

stands well with his comrades who knows how to hold his tongue and has money in his pocket.

From Eton he had gone to Oxford, but did not take his degree, for his father dying suddenly, it was decided that he should at once become initiated in the mysteries of business, so as to be able to take his place as a member of the firm in which his father had for many years been the senior partner.

Of course the health of valuable members of society must not be allowed to suffer from over-work, and so it became necessary that daily attendance for a few hours at the office should be varied by a large amount of shooting and hunting in the winter, and by frequent and sometimes protracted visits to the Continent in the summer.

Mr. Yorke had never been "fast;" but it was at this period of his life that—if scandal is to be believed—he showed some tendency towards being what the world calls "gay." If, however, he had had wild oats they were soon sown, for he had barely completed his twenty-fifth year when he led to the altar the Lady Arabella, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the proudest, but poorest, peer in the United Kingdom.

His mother died soon after his marriage, some said from joy. Her last words were:

"Thank God I have lived to see it! An earl's daughter! My dear, dear boy! An earl's daughter!"

He had been a good son, and soon the world pointed to him as a good husband and a good father. Of his being a good citizen there could be no doubt, for he was ever ready to associate his name with any undertaking which had for its object the moral or material elevation of some neglected or degraded class.

There was not a charity which had not enrolled his name, and against that name was always to be seen a row of figures, in any of which a whole army of widows' mites might easily have been swallowed up. Sums so large that the hearts of many charitable people were filled with envy, whilst a vague feeling came over them that the secret of the philosopher's stone must have something to do with beer.

As a recognition of this great generosity, there was hardly a society of any note of which Mr. Yorke was not either president, vice-president, patron, or trustee. It is true he did not frequently—it would be more

accurate, perhaps, to leave out the "frequently" — attend committee-meetings, or take any active part in the organisation or management of the institutions in the welfare of which he felt such a deep interest. For this he pleaded he had no time, and that he had unbounded confidence in the committees, but, nevertheless, at the annual public meetings, to which his presence gave great weight, he always deeply lamented how little he had been able to do personally, and dilated in glowing terms on the services of those "who, more fortunate than himself, had been enabled, through an untiring devotion, which needed no comment, to confer benefits on their fellows which formed the noblest monuments to themselves."

But Mr. Yorke did more than this. He had all the printed reports placed upon his breakfast-table, and never failed to recommend their perusal to his wife and daughters and their friends.

Mr. Yorke was a Churchman: he would allow of no other term. He hated controversy, and liked dogma. To indulge, so it was said, Lady Arabella's æsthetic tastes, St. Stylites—which he had built at the cost of some forty thousand pounds, in a good

year when the excise returns were high—had been made unusually ornate, and the services were accused of being extremely ritualistic; but Mr. Yorke himself professed to be moderate in all things, for he wished to stand well with all men—that is to say, all men with whom it was worth while to stand well.

St. Stylites had cost Mr. Yorke forty thousand pounds—a large sum; but then he not only had the satisfaction of feeling he had done a good work—and that always brings its own reward—but of hearing from all quarters that he had achieved a great architectural success.

As he drove each morning towards the city it was a source of honest pride to him to see how the tall spire of St. Stylites shot up high above all other spires, and to know that so long as St. Stylites might stand, his name would be connected with it. And even now in certain clerical circles no man's name stood higher; it had even once been mentioned in Convocation, but with bated breath; and it was whispered that a very "high personage" had been graciously pleased to use some very condescending expressions with respect to him in connection with this act of public-

spirited liberality, so that an idea had got abroad amongst Mr. Yorke's friends that in the course of a very short time he would be made a baronet.

It is given to so few people to have an opportunity of worshipping in churches built by themselves, that it is difficult for those to whom such a privilege has been denied to realise the feelings of those to whom it has been granted. But that it must have its attractions and advantages, is scarcely to be doubted.

Lady Arabella and her daughters often declared they could never pray so well anywhere else as in St. Stylites; and Mr. Yorke seemed to share this feeling, though, practical man that he was, he gave expression to it in a somewhat different manner. On his way to the city he was not satisfied with looking at St. Stylites from a distance; he always drove to it, though it was somewhat out of his way, and joined in the daily morning service, which through the practised fluency of the curate, the Rev. Intonious Weeke—of which that gentleman was not a little proud—was never allowed to exceed the limits of a quarter of an hour.

This habit on the part of a wealthy city

man was naturally a source of extreme edification to the whole neighbourhood; and well it might be so. Yet—it almost seems incredible—so rancorous are the feelings of certain sections of the community, that Jarvis the grocer, whose shop was on the opposite side of the street, exactly facing the church, had been known to say:

"I hate such humbug! Why doesn't he go the rounds of his beastly gin-palaces and——"—he used a word not fit for polite ears—"of an evening, and see where his money comes from!"

But then Jarvis was a Radical Dissenter, who never went inside a church; and, although he sold cheap wines, always boasted of being an abstainer.

As the possessor of a large fortune, the husband of an earl's daughter, the owner of a large landed property, and last—and not least in the eyes of many—a good Churchman, it was but natural that Mr. Yorke should have claims upon society which society could not ignore, and you had but to take up the fashionable papers during the season to see that they had been recognised. No bishop could give a dinner without Mr. and Lady Arabella Yorke; city feasts required

their presence; the leaders of fashion attached them to their train; and Yorke was the name which not unfrequently struck the eye amongst the privileged few who had been favoured with invitations on the occasion of an exalted personage having deigned to accept the hospitality of some noble peer or rich commoner. It would seem as if such a position as this—so far as society was concerned—had left little to be desired. But it was not so; climb as we will we never reach, we only extend, the horizon of our wishes.

Thus it was that Mr. Yorke, not a little exercised, perhaps, in the matter by the regrets of Lady Arabella, had a secret source of sorrow. The charmed circle which encloses those who take an active part in political life was closed to him. He had no place at the Speaker's festive board; the various members of the Cabinet or the leader of the Opposition gave their official dinners, and he was not present; when his friends who had seats in Parliament spoke authoritatively on questions about which they were in reality absolutely and entirely ignorant, they were listened to with rapt attention, whilst he was not even appealed to.

All this was very galling. Mr. Yorke felt it keenly; and hence it was it had become the great object of his ambition to see his name followed by the two letters—which he regarded as the "open sesame" before which all these closed doors were to fly open—M.P.; and it was generally understood that whenever a vacancy occurred in his own county he was to stand for it.

He had been once or twice tempted to enter Parliament in some other way, but of course a borough for a member of the firm of Souseman and Soppit was out of the question, and success in such counties as had offered themselves was far from certain. So Mr. Yorke preferred to wait, rather than run the risk of tarnishing the reputation of that which laid claim to being one of the most successful commercial undertakings in the country, by associating it with anything approaching to failure.

Mr. Yorke was a Conservative. Of the three estates, the House of Lords was the one he regarded with the greatest interest. It had been said it was because he secretly looked forward to a seat in that august assembly; but he had an equal reverence for the bench of bishops, and yet no one could

pretend he had ever aspired to the dignity of wearing lawn sleeves. If Mr. Yorke had been asked why it was, he probably would have said it was because he loved our glorious constitution, and looked upon the House of Peers as its chief bulwark and defence.

In his county Mr. Yorke was much looked up to. He attended the Bench as regularly as could be expected from a man who hunted his own hounds, shot over his own covers, and assisted in shooting over those of his neighbours. In his magisterial decisions he was generally lenient, unless the rights of property were infringed by unlawful trespass, or the pursuit of game, in which cases he never failed to insist upon the necessity of a severe example.

Silent, grave, and sedate, there was something in his manner more than in anything he ever said or did which impressed those who came in contact with him for the first time with the idea that he was a man of sound judgment. He owed much of his influence to this, and to the fact that he seldom gave an opinion till after the event, which enabled him to say that things had turned out exactly as he had anticipated. Besides, by his silence, he did not impede

action, nor offend people by trying to prove them in the wrong.

In person, Mr. Yorke was tall and well-made, though a tendency to stoutness was beginning to interfere with the symmetry of a naturally active figure. His hair was prematurely grey and thinner about the temples than is generally seen in a man of his age. He had regular, well-cut features, but his expression was cold and impenetrable, the more so, perhaps, because his eyes avoided, rather than met, the eyes of those with whom he was in conversation. But, take him all in all, he was a fine, good-looking man; the model of respectability; and he placed himself before the world in a light of which the great firm of Souseman and Soppit had every reason to be proud.

Mr. Yorke's affection for his wife and children showed itself chiefly in allowing them to do just as they pleased. Oddly enough he seemed to be less looked up to in his own family than by the outside world; Lady Arabella's manner to her husband would have been called condescending to anyone else; and his children, with the instinctive knowledge which the young possess

of the characters of those with whom they live, never felt quite at ease in his presence, and loved him, as it were despite themselves, because he was their father.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW PAGES FROM A JOURNAL.

It was a little more than a year before the incident in the Park that Victoria Marsh, then on the eve of entering into training as a nurse at St. Tobias's Hospital, had, on retiring to her room for the night, sat down and written as follows :

"This is probably my last day of freedom for a long, long time.

"But is it freedom ? Is there such a thing as freedom ?

"For thought, perhaps—yes. For action—no. Are not most of our actions the slaves of our thoughts ? Yet our thoughts have to submit to a higher power—the will. Even our poor thoughts are not free.

"But what is this mysterious will, this prime motor of our lives ? I wish that I

could think it out, but I cannot; and yet I try, and try——

"Try, till my very brain aches, and find myself not one whit wiser than when I began to think.

"It sometimes strikes me that I think too much; and it is this over-thinking which makes me feel different from other people. It may not be perceived—for I try to hide it—but I *am* different.

"This is perhaps why I take so much delight in jotting down my innermost thoughts; in making as it were a confidante of myself, and in placing my whole life in the form of a written picture between the clasped cover of the book in which I am now writing.

"When I have written a few pages, it often seems to me as if I had created a sympathy outside myself, or rather as if the scenes and incidents as they are jotted down, became scenes and incidents in some other life than mine, which interest me to a degree that is only limited by the amount of sensibility belonging to my nature. I believe it is this habit of keeping a journal which has preserved my thoughts from becoming morbid, and given my mind a healthier tone than naturally

belongs to it. How much have I not learned through this daily examination of myself—by myself?

"It seems so very long since I began to keep a journal, for I commenced when a mere child. It was only yesterday I came across a few stray pages—the only surviving fragments—of this early record. How precious each reminiscence they recall is to me now! Yet after it was written, I remember I set so little store upon it, that it was chiefly with the leaves of my old journal that my manufactory of kites—and I was a great maker of kites in those days—was kept going.

"I do not know why, but this evening my thoughts are carried back, more than ever, to those early days, and the scenes of the past present themselves so vividly to my imagination, that I am, as it were, compelled to revert to them. Perhaps it is the sight of these few torn and faded pages. When I look upon them, it is as if they reproached me for my forgetfulness and neglect. They seem to say: 'Oh, foolish one, the things we speak of once made up your life—they make it now—for all the present is built up on the past, and all the future is but its poor heir.'

"Dear old fragments, I will rescue you from oblivion, and with your aid I will complete the story of my life.

"Ah me! when I look back I can scarcely believe I am still young. I ought to be a hundred years old at the very least.

"The first roll I take up—it was some years later before I had arrived at keeping my journal in a book—consists of a few sheets of coarse, very yellow paper, written over closely in a bold, ill-formed hand, with lines which, no matter how straight they may have been at first, always in the end sloped down in a most provoking manner to the right. There is no date, but I know some of the incidents which are mentioned took place between my ninth and tenth year. My aunt was then alive, and I was living with her in my dear old home.

"EXTRACTS FROM MY OLD JOURNAL
(*With the spelling corrected*).

"'To-day was very fine, and the sun shone out quite bright. I was idle with my lessons, for the sky was so blue, and the garden looked so nice, and the old robins were out upon the lawn, that I could not help looking out of

window, and then auntie was cross—no, not quite cross, but very quiet and grave, which she always is when I do anything she does not like. How I wish she would scold, I should not mind it half so much. Another egg from my white hen, and she cackled so when she had laid it. I shall be quite rich soon.

"'*Sunday.*—I went to church this morning. Auntie was not well, and could not go. So many people in church, and Jane Hawkins's little girl in a nice new hat with yellow strings. I liked the sermon very much; it was all about the sheep who went astray, and the Good Shepherd, and I thought of my little lamb the savage dog killed last year. But I was so ashamed, when I got home from church auntie asked me the text, and I could not tell her; the truth is, just as Mr. Dorman spoke it, I was thinking of the organ, and wondering, if I were one of the gilt pipes, whether I should like to be a big one or a small one. I did not tell auntie that, it was *so* silly; and it was bad enough as it was when she said, "Victoria"—she always calls me Victoria when she is not pleased—"you grieve me very much when you let your thoughts wander in church. You

must never let your thoughts wander." Auntie is always telling me this, and looks so sad when she does so. Poor dear old auntie! I wonder why it is she looks so pale and her hand trembles so? and how tiresome it must be to be so lame and to walk with a stick. Last night, just before I went to bed, I saw such a lovely glow-worm on the bank by the gate. It looked *just* as big and *just* as bright as a star. How can glow-worms carry a fire about in their insides without being burnt? I must ask Dr. Pringle.

"'*Monday.*—May-day. I took auntie such a nice nosegay of flowers before she was up, all out of my own garden, and oh! she was *so* pleased, and said that, of all the beautiful things with which God has blessed us on this earth, there was nothing she loved so much as flowers, and that she never looked at them without thinking of heaven. Was it not nice? It rained in the afternoon, and I tore my striped frock against the nail in the rabbit-hutch—it was very tiresome.'

* * * * *

"Here there is a hiatus of some months, for when I next wrote, although the day of the week even had been torn off, it was evidently winter:

"'I do not like these dark, cold days; and the evenings are so long now, that auntie is too ill to come downstairs. When the time comes for me to go to bed, I feel quite glad. To-day I saw such a funny thing, and it made me laugh so, but it is a long story, and I am tired, so I will write it down another day.'

* * * * *

"Another break.

"'*Jan.* 1*st.*—I don't like the first day of the new year at all. It seems so unkind to turn one's back on the poor old year that is gone. But the new year may be a kinder year than the last to me; and if auntie should only get well and bright again, I will say Dear, dear new year, it is you I love the best. It was so fine and frosty when we drove over here this morning, and I should have liked it very much, but I could not help crying all the way at leaving dear auntie, though Dr. Pringle said that he hoped it would only be for a short time, and that if auntie were kept very quiet, she might soon get well again; and that a short visit to Deepdale, which is the name of the place where he lives, would do me good. Dear auntie, what can it be makes her look so strange? and why do I almost always find a tear upon her cheek when I

stoop down to kiss her? And how beautifully she talks! But what did she mean this morning, when she said that she might soon have to go on a long journey; but that, if she did, the time would soon pass, and it would not be very long before we should meet again? And when I asked if she were not too weak to go, and whether I could help her, she said, "That God would give her strength, and that when she had been well, she had tried to get everything ready, though she feared she might have forgotten many things." Then she kissed me, and said: "Remember, my darling!"—she had never called me so before—"remember, my darling, we must always try and be ready, for we know not what a day may bring forth; if you wish to be happy, remember this. Now, go; Dr. and Mrs. Pringle are very kind, and you must obey them in everything." And then she said good-bye, and kissed me twice; and, whilst she held me in her arms, she said a short prayer and blessed me. It was so solemn—much more solemn than being in church. They are so kind here. I have such a nice pet of a little room; and I like Chub and Sis so much. Chub is just my age, and such a jolly boy. When he came into

the room where I was sitting with Dr. and Mrs. Pringle and Sis—who is nearly two years younger than I am—the doctor called out, in his funny way: "Come here, Chub, I have brought you another sister, whom you are to love exactly as you love Sis, but not one atom more; and if you don't make her a good brother, I will break every bone in your skin." And then Chub came bouncing up to me, and gave me a kiss as loud as the crack of a whip, and said: "Come along and help Sis and me build up a snow-house; it is awfully jolly out in the yard;" and so it was, though I have two fresh chilblains since the morning, and they itch terribly.'

* * * * *

"The next entry, written nearly a month later, is all but illegible, and the many blots, as if from fallen tears, have added to the difficulty of deciphering it:

"'*Jan. 26th.*—It is so long since I have written anything; and now I don't know what to write, for when I try to think, my thoughts seem to fly away and hide themselves in a place that is so dark—black just like night—that I cannot find them again. I think it must be my black dress. And then my eyes fill with tears, and I can't see, and I make

great blots. It is just three weeks to-day since dear auntie died. How dreadful it is to think of, and I playing on that very afternoon with Chub and Sis, and laughing and so happy. I shall never be happy again, for all my unkind thoughts of dear old auntie when she was alive, and my naughty words to her when I was in a pet, will come up. And I shall never be able to throw my arms round her again, and say, Dear auntie, I am so—so—sorry ; and I will be good and never make you unhappy again ! I wonder why God lets people die ; I am sure *I* would not !

"'*Jan.* 30*th.*—Three days and I have written nothing ; but then my cold has been so bad that I could do nothing but sneeze. What funny things dreams are ; and how dreadful it would be sometimes if they turned out true ! Susannah, the cook, says that hers often do, and that she would not dream of a white cat for ten pounds—or, as she always say, ten puns—for whenever she does, some one is sure to die. And I had such a horrid dream last night—no, it was not horrid, for some of it was quite lovely—and I remembered it all when I awoke, and so I will write it down ; and this was my dream : I thought I had grown up, but what made it so odd,

although it was I who did everything, yet it seemed all the while as if it were being done by some one else, and that I was standing by and looking on. And so I saw myself grown quite tall, and dressed in grey, with the skirts tucked up and made much tighter than they are worn now, and with such a pretty little black hat with a white feather in it, walking along a path which led amongst trees high up above a stream which rushed through great rocks; and when I looked up, very high indeed above me, there was the top of a snow mountain, and the clear blue sky, and I thought it must be Switzerland, just as I used to see it in the two pictures in the parlour of my dear old home. And so I went on walking, and wondering where I was, when all of a sudden I thought I heard a great noise, like a horse galloping; but when I turned round to see, I found there was no horse, but that it was the beating of my own heart I had heard: and though I placed my hands upon it, and tried to keep it quiet, it would not be still. So I became frightened, for I thought there must be some danger near, and was about to cry out for help, when I felt a hand touch mine, and there, close to me, stood a man, with dark

hair and beautiful blue eyes, and such a soft sweet voice, though he only said one word, and that was "Victoria." But I knew he loved me, for he looked so kind; and just as I was about to tell him that I loved him, and would be his wife, the earth seemed to tremble, and the trees all to change into stones, and from behind one of them came a figure all in white, and I knew it was an angel; and though she was young and beautiful, I knew at once it was dear auntie when she turned her soft loving eyes upon me and said: "Child, stop! You must not love him. If you did, and became his wife, it would be very cruel and unkind. If you would show your love, you must never marry—never!" Then, just as she said the last word, it was no longer an angel, nor my dear auntie, looking on me with soft loving eyes, but a hideous shape, I could not make out whether it was an animal or what; and just as I felt I was going to die, I was so frightened, I heard a great rattle like the sound of a gun, and a hunter, who was just like Chub, only that he had grown into a big man, ran down the rocks, and called out, and—then I awoke, and there was the sun shining in at my window, and Chub throwing up gravel, and

calling out: "Vic, Vic! don't be so lazy. I want you to come down as quickly as you can; the cat has got six kittens, and I want you to help me to choose which to keep; one has such a jolly white tip to its tail, and another is a beautiful black, just like an old boot.

"'*Feb. 6th.*—To-day Dr. Pringle called me into his library. I am always afraid when I go there, it is so full of cross-looking books, and there are all sorts of queer-shaped glass things upon shelves behind the door. When I went in he looked very grave, and said: "Victoria, I want to have a little quiet talk with you." And when I had sat down he told me that before dear auntie died she had written two letters to me, one of which was to be given me shortly after her death, and the other was to be kept until I was nineteen; and that he thought it right I should now read the first one, so that I might know what my aunt's wishes were. My hand shook so I thought I never should open the letter, but when I did there was dear auntie's writing, only made larger that I might read it more easily; and it said—but I will write it down, though I am not sure that I need do so, for I know every word by heart—better even

than my catechism. This is what dear auntie said:

"'"My own dear Child,

"'"I am about to die, and to leave you alone in this world of trials and temptations. There is much I would wish to say to you, but you are too young to have it said to you now, so I have written it all down, that when you are grown up—should it so please God—into a young woman, and are old enough to understand it, you may read it and learn from it—with God's help, for without *that* we can do nothing—so to guide your conduct that whatever you do in this world may be beneficial to others and acceptable to Him whose will it is our bounden *duty* to find out and do. Yes, my dear child, let that word "duty" be ever present in your thoughts. Whenever you are in doubt as to how you should act, only ask yourself what you ought to do in order to do right, and all will go well. I leave you in the charge of valued friends. Mrs. Pringle will, I know, watch over you with a mother's care, and I am quite sure there is no one who is able to give you better advice than the kind doctor. It is my wish that you should seek

it on all occasions, and that you should obey him in all things. I would say much more to you, but I am very weak. That God may watch over you and bless you is my earnest prayer—the last words that I shall ever write. I feel that my end is very near. Remember—duty—there is no other rule—none.

"'"MARGARET M——."

"'She had begun her name—it was not at all like her beautiful writing; the strokes were so crooked—and Doctor Pringle told me, as I fell sobbing in his arms, that she had become too weak to finish it, and that she laid her head quietly upon her pillow, and never spoke again. Oh, auntie, dear auntie, I never knew how much I loved you till now! I shall never be happy till I see you again. But I shall have to die, and I don't want to die, for I should have to be buried, and have earth thrown upon me, and left alone in a dreadful churchyard; no! I am too wicked; I am not fit to die. I will not ask God to let me die until I am good.'

* * * * *

"Now comes a great gap in my journal, and the demand upon it for kites must have

been very great. Several years are wanting, and the writing has become much what it is at the present day. It is now no longer written on loose sheets, carelessly stitched together, but is kept in a small account-book, to be changed ere long for one of those yearly diaries, which is its form at the present time. Each year becoming more and more voluminous: a vivid picture of my life at the time—a history of the causes which have made me—for it is a reality, and no mere freak of fancy—so different from others. Yes; I must write it down again: 'so different from others.' But need I be perpetually lamenting over this? No, no! Victoria! No lamentations; no weak wailing and wringing of hands. When courage is lost, life has no hope. Leave it to cowards to despair and—die."

Victoria wrote the last few lines so rapidly that her pen seemed to fly over the paper, and when she had finished the last word she threw it from her, and drawing back from the table at which she had been sitting, she leant back in her chair, and bowing down her head, covered her face with her hands.

She remained in this attitude for a long, long time; motionless, with her hair, which

she had released from its plaits before sitting down to write, streaming in wild luxuriance over her neck and shoulders. In silent communion with herself she forgot all else. The lamp, which for some time had been burning low, went out unnoticed, and when she next raised her head and looked around her she would have been in darkness but for the gleaming stars. Ursa Major stood high above the horizon, and her eyes—they were red with weeping—attracted towards it as by some irresistible impulse, followed the direction of the pointers. "Ah! had not each life its pole-star; some great outside interest upon which it could concentrate itself; some aim and object immeasurably higher than the contemplation and study of its own individuality? Was it not through external and not internal forces that each star was kept in its appointed place and moved in its appointed orbit? Were not the educators of our lives the objects by which we were surrounded, and our thoughts but the outcome of impressions produced upon the senses by external influences? Why, then, this perpetual study and self-examination of ourselves, until self-consciousness dominates over every other sentiment, and egoism assumes the direction of

our lives? How can those who are perpetually dwelling on themselves hope to escape from themselves? And yet this is just what I am ever doing; I, who would give vigour to this poor weak brain and firmness to this faltering will. The lessons of the past I have already learnt—sad, painful lessons; it is enough that I should apply them to the present. This battle of life can only be fought and won by looking forward. It is a battle-field from which there is no retreat, and he only dies with honour who receives all his wounds in front."

Such were some of Victoria Marsh's reflections as she sat with folded arms, gazing upon the stars. Suddenly heavy clouds swept across the sky, and her room became quite dark. It seemed to awaken her from the deep reverie into which she had fallen.

"What silly sentimental creatures we poor women are!" she said, as she arose and lighted a match. "Here I sit dreaming my life away, when I ought to be up and doing. But I will dream no more; I will bid adieu to the past, and to clench my resolution will cut off my retreat."

Saying this, she took up the loose sheets of paper which were lying on her table, and

throwing them into the grate, piled the carefully-bound volumes of her journal upon them. In a few minutes a bright blaze, then a smouldering mass, showed but too plainly that strength of will had overcome all sentimental scruples. There was no going back now; it was with Victoria as it was with the Athenians of old, when they had burnt their ships.

But one paper remained. It was her aunt's letter; not that which she had copied in her journal, but the one Dr. Pringle had been directed to give her when she was old enough to understand its contents. This letter Victoria now took up; as she did so her hand trembled, and the convulsive twitching of her mouth showed the painful nature of the emotions the sight of it renewed.

"This I will keep," she said; "keep sacred from every living soul. For why should I care to be understood? I am too proud for pity—but why pity?" she quickly added; "I have but done my duty, and the sense that I have done it—am doing it—shall be my solace, my reward. Aunt, dear," she said, kissing the letter, "I will be firm; your last wishes shall be obeyed. I will have

no guide but duty. To that I will sacrifice all—all."

She spoke in a clear, decided tone, but as she said the last words the tenderness of the woman's nature asserted itself, and a flood of tears revealed but too clearly that the tenderness of a woman's heart cannot be obliterated, however inflexible may be a woman's will.

CHAPTER VII.

DEEPDALE AND ITS INMATES.

PERHAPS no one was better known in the part of Middleshire in which Mr. Yorke lived, than Dr. Pringle.

Now, no one could come into contact with the good doctor without feeling, that though old in years and somewhat less physically strong than he might have been, he had preserved more freshness and elasticity of mind than is generally to be found in men of his age. Indeed, his manner was so genial and cheery, that it was impossible to look upon him as old; but the greenness of his age was due in no small measure to his originality of thought, and to the readiness with which he was able to accept new ideas; and this intellectual vigour had been preserved by his mind having been kept in constant exercise—for it was one of his favourite

maxims, and one that he was constantly enforcing on his patients: "If you would keep the machinery in order, no matter whether of the mind or body, there must be no corrosion—no rust." And hence it was that nothing annoyed him more than having to deal with those ailments which are but the natural consequence of indolence or excess.

Dr. Pringle, himself the son of a country surgeon, had gained a high position in his profession at a comparatively early age. Like most doctors, he had been very much behind the scenes of life, and was perhaps on that account somewhat inclined, at times, to be cynical; but he was too open, too benevolent, and too warm-hearted, to be really so.

But there was one thing of which the doctor had a thorough hatred—and Dr. Pringle certainly was a good hater. It was of everything which came under the denomination of that which he called "humbug."

He had commenced practice in London, where he had attained very considerable eminence; and through his many popular qualities, was fast arriving at the position of a fashionable doctor. But a London life had no attractions for him, and the nature of the greater part of the ailments he was called

upon to cure was not such as to afford any great scope for professional skill.

"I was being paid for being a mere medical humbug," he used to say; "and I am afraid to think of what I should have grown into had I remained a few years longer. However, I believe I should have died, for work in which one can take no interest is killing—and good heavens! what work it was!"

He was fond of illustrating his assertions, and so continued:

"How well I remember going to bed one very cold winter's night, thoroughly fagged out, having left directions that I was not to be disturbed unless it was absolutely necessary; when, lo and behold! before I had been in bed an hour, there was a furious ringing of the bell, and I was roused up to go as quickly as possible to see the old Dowager Lady Dowdycomb, who was seriously ill. I had my suspicions, so I at first refused to go, and sent a polite message to say I would call early in the morning; but when the servant sent up to say it would not do, 'for her ladyship was so bad, that it was likely she might die in no time,' there was no help for it. So I had to dress and sally forth. The night was horribly cold, and I was not in the best of tempers. On

entering the old lady's room, I gently drew back the curtains, and assuming my blandest tones, inquired how she felt.

"'Oh! doctor, doctor!' answered her ladyship, 'I don't know what is the matter with me, it is so cold, and I can't keep warm.'

"'Cold, madam!' I cried in a fury. 'Cold! I should think you were cold, and everybody else in this frost-bitten world, on such a night as this. What do you want me to do? Do you want me to get into bed and warm you?"

It can easily be supposed that a feud sprang up between the Dowager Lady Dowdycomb and Dr. Pringle—two separate camps were formed by the friends of each—and some very pretty fighting was the consequence, which lasted at least three months.

"I have had quite enough of London and Dowager Lady Dowdycombs," said the doctor, as he retired into the country; where, having a fair private fortune, partly his own and partly brought him by his wife, he purchased Deepdale, and practised more for pleasure than profit—for he hated fees, and only took them from rich people.

In a pretty cottage in the neighbourhood of Deepdale, a lady named Marsh, with her

little niece Victoria, had shortly before taken up her residence; and a close intimacy soon sprang up between her and the doctor's family.

Mrs. Marsh was an intelligent, clever woman, who, although her manner was generally very reserved, took a warm interest in many of the subjects which formed the doctor's favourite hobbies. This perhaps it was which had at first attracted him towards her—until the relations ordinarily existing between a doctor and his patients had gradually changed into a feeling of the most sincere friendship. Then, too, the peculiar state of Mrs. Marsh's health was a source of great interest to Dr. Pringle, for he was fond of psychological studies and of investigating the relations in which mind stands to matter, and there was something in Mrs. Marsh's state he could not quite make out. Sometimes he thought it was her mind that was sick; sometimes that it was her body. He never quite knew, though with all his frankness it is doubtful whether he would have confessed this had he been asked, for there are some things which people do not confess, even to themselves.

It was, perhaps, only a natural consequence of the great friendship between Dr. Pringle

and Mrs. Marsh, that when she died, he found he had been constituted guardian to the little Victoria, to whom a small but sufficient fortune had been left; and from that time she was looked upon, in every respect, as one of the doctor's family.

Mrs. Pringle was an amiable, good woman, utterly devoid of any individuality of character; but she had the rare virtue of being a good listener, and was a comfortable kind of indoor wife; for if she had any talent at all, it was for housekeeping; and probably there was no house in the county kept in better order—no house where there was greater punctuality—certainly none where, without pretension, the dinners were served in better style. This, perhaps, may have been the reason why few people were more popular than Mrs. Pringle. The doctor used to say laughingly, "My dear, everybody loves you because you feed them so well." And, although no gourmand himself, he liked things to be well cooked; for he believed there could be no real happiness with a bad digestion, and was suspected by many of his friends of holding to the opinion of the Chinese—and an opinion some thousand years old is always valuable—that the seat of the affections is in the stomach.

With regard to Chub and Sis — whose names, as given them by their godfathers and godmothers, were Charles and Elizabeth. Chub was a jolly roundabout fellow, fair at lessons, good at play, with a temper like an indiarubber ball, that you may throw about for ever without finding a hard point in, and an appetite—never was there such an appetite, it seemed to increase with eating.

Sis was younger than her brother. Even as a baby she had such pretty, bright, wicked eyes, and such pretty, winning little ways, that no one—not even excepting those who profess to hate babies—could resist her ; and as she grew older her captivating powers seemed to increase rather than to diminish.

In the companionship of Chub and Sis, Victoria had been brought up and educated, for it was one of the doctor's favourite theories that the system of education for both sexes, up to the time when it became necessary for them to commence a course of technical study, ought to be identical.

"Take care what you are about," urged some of his friends, "or we shall find all our girls turned into boys."

The doctor laughed.

"My dear ladies, do not be alarmed ; the

assimilation of the same knowledge will produce a totally different set of ideas. We do not find that feeding on the same food produces the disastrous results you so much fear, and I should so much deplore. It were perhaps better that each one of us should have a selected diet, and that each child's character should be strengthened and formed by a separate educational process; but the best thing has often to give way to the next best, and so we can only seek to provide the food which best nourishes the many, and the knowledge which has the most general application."

So it was that Victoria had received all the elements of a thoroughly practical education with Chub and Sis. She and Chub distinguishing themselves—she most—in natural history and the natural sciences; whilst Sis devoted herself to German and French, and gave more time to music than the doctor cared to reckon up, for a wheedling little puss was Sis, and none knew better how to find out the soft places in her father's heart.

So time flew on. The doctor observing and directing, or thinking he was directing, as he probably would have been had it not been for the charming coaxing little ways of Miss

Sis. Victoria miles ahead, and poor honest Chub, painfully impressed with his inferiority, plodding on behind. He loved her dearly, but he did not like it.

"Confound it," he used to say, "it is too bad to be beaten by a girl! I wish she had been a boy."

But a girl she was, and so he had to put up with it! Sis, who was younger, did not mind it; she hated every word in the dictionary which ended in ology, and gave herself pretty, captivating little airs, which seemed as natural to her as a golden sunbeam upon a butterfly's wing.

Mrs. Pringle loved them all equally, for hers was a large roomy heart, but it had not many mansions. The doctor, on the contrary, seemed to have a special niche for each—for he loved each one differently. Victoria held the highest place in his esteem; Chub he loved because Chub was such a dear good fellow, and he had been a brute not to have done so; and Sis—provoking, teasing, little Sis—it was difficult to say what was the exact place she occupied in her father's heart; but one thing is very certain, the niche, wherever it might be, was hung around with wreaths, and strewn with flowers.

It was about a year after Mrs. Marsh's death, that Mr. Yorke became the purchaser of the Nettleton estate. The house, Nettleton Court, was only two miles from Deepdale, and in the course of time the younger members of the two families had become inseparable, to the great surprise and annoyance of several other families whose endeavours to gain the friendly recognition of the rich newcomers had been coldly repelled.

The fact is, the young people were of the same age, and youth in the country would find it very dull without companionship. Then the doctor, with all his peculiar views, had seen the world and was full of anecdote; and Mrs. Pringle was so unpretending and amiable that she never placed herself in anybody's way. There was, however, another reason; from the very first moment of Mr. Yorke's seeing Victoria Marsh, he had seemed greatly attracted towards her, and in a short time it was one of the playful jokes of the home circle that he cared more for her than he did for his own daughters. This feeling, however, did not seem to be reciprocated. Victoria, who had soon established relations with Geraldine and Eva, of that close and affectionate kind which is characteristic of

feminine attachments whilst life is young and its emotions have not been chilled by the cold heartlessness of the world, for some unaccountable reason never felt at ease in Mr. Yorke's presence. She was angry with herself for not being able to respond to his advances, for he was—so far as his nature permitted him to be—kindness itself. Yet do what she would, a feeling she could not describe crept over her whenever he drew near; and sometimes it seemed to her as if she felt his presence the moment he entered the room, although she had not observed that he had done so.

"I am afraid you do not love my father, Vic," said Eva to her one day, as they walked up and down one of the shady avenues near the Court, with their arms encircling each other's waists.

"He is very kind to me, and he is your father, my dear Eva, and perhaps it may seem very ungrateful. But, you know, the only person I ever truly loved is in the grave; and I have not been taught to love as you have, darling, for my parents both died when I was so young that I have not even the slightest remembrance of them. It is true I love the Pringles very much, and you know

I love you; but then there is a difference—it can never be the same as with one's own flesh and blood."

"Poor child!" said Eva, caressingly; "I wonder if your mother were like you."

"Why?" asked Victoria.

"Because I am sure I should have loved her. Did your aunt never talk to you about her?"

"Never," said Victoria; "and I often thought it was very strange of dear auntie not to have done so. I only know that my mother's name was Violet, for it is the name engraved on the locket which I always wear, and which contains a little curl of her soft brown bair."

"Violet!" said Eva; "what a charming name! I am sure she must have been very sweet."

The only discordant element in the intercourse between the two families was the dislike which Chub entertained for Geraldine's and Eva's brother Marmaduke, or, as he was always spoken of in his own family, "Duke."

Though frequently away from home during his vacations, he was there often enough to take a part in the amusements which were shared in common by his sisters and the

young people from Deepdale; and to Chub he made himself thoroughly disagreeable, for he was older, and was supposed to have seen something of the world, and so gave himself airs of great superiority, which were gall and bitterness to Chub. Then he was, or pretended to be, very fond of Sis, and that Chub did not like, though Sis did, which was another source of deep annoyance to him. Besides, Duke had once had the impertinence to speak of his sister as Fizz—little Fizz—declaring that she was so bright and so sweet and so sparkling that she reminded him of a bottle of champagne, and so he had dared to call her Fizz; but he never ventured to do so a second time, for though he pretended to look upon Chub as a boy whose anger was quite beneath his notice, there was something in the boy's anger which made him quail; and with all his braggadocio and loud talking, Duke was a coward. But he was a good-looking fellow, who could put on pleasing manners, and make himself very agreeable when he chose, so that it is not to be wondered at that Sis took his part whenever Chub said anything against him, or that Duke and his doings often formed the subject of her meditations. When Duke was at home, he

became the centre round which everyone else was made to revolve; it was Duke here, Duke there, Duke everywhere. Lady Arabella seemed to think of no one else; all her affection was centred on Duke.

When he was away, the young people paired off in couples; Eva and Victoria, Geraldine and Sis; with poor roundabout good-natured Chub at the beck and call of each, performing very much the functions of a well-trained Newfoundland dog, and passing very much of his spare time in going to and fro upon that portion of the earth which lay between the two houses, with little scented notes folded up in a triangular form. Poor Chub! he sometimes was inclined to growl and show his teeth, but a few gentle pats and kind words always brought him to his senses, unless Sis interposed with a request that he would not make himself ridiculous, when it would require much coaxing to bring him back to obedience.

So things had gone on, each year seeming to repeat itself. But silent old Time had been working stealthily none the less. The lads had passed the hobbledehoy stage, and the girls had reached that advanced period of life when they affect to scorn all those they

call "boys," and profess to prefer the society of "men."

It was at this critical moment that Sir Francis Hawthorne appeared upon the scene, and became a frequent visitor at the two houses.

CHAPTER VIII.

CUPID SHOOTS HIS SHAFTS.

Sir Francis Hawthorne was soon in high favour at the Court, and at Deepdale he was sure to meet with a warm welcome. He divided his attentions fairly between them; in the summer passing much of his time with the family at the Court, should they happen to be in the county; in the winter frequenting the doctor's cosy fireside with a persistence which made saucy Miss Sis say that he had become her father's tame cat.

But this was said in pure spite by Miss Sis. Spite, because Sir Francis would not fall at once a victim to her winning little ways, but would go on talking upon tiresome dry subjects which she could not, and would not, understand.

Yet those winning little ways had gone much nearer than she was aware of towards

effecting their object. As Sir Francis discoursed with the doctor, as he was wont to do, upon the true and the false, upon right and wrong, upon the government of the few, and the happiness of the many, upon the best mode of binding together in the bonds of love the various classes with their several interests into which society is divided, etc., etc., etc., he gradually found himself addressing his remarks less to the doctor than to the owner of the bright eyes which from time to time were directed towards him.

No wonder that at times he became a little incoherent, and that when he and the doctor differed he was sure to get the worst of the argument.

The only wonder is, how he could have overlooked Victoria, and bestowed all his attention on that sly little puss Sis; merely because Victoria, who was worth a dozen of her, was silent and pale, and did not know how to use her eyes.

But all men are given to making mistakes in such matters, and Sir Francis was no exception to the rule.

For some little time Sis seemed each day to grow prettier, to become more captivating. Then she began to show herself—a very little,

but yet too much—as she was, for Sis was as changeable as a chameleon, only that she changed her little winning ways and not her colours, changed them for other little winning ways, each one so charming that it was difficult to know when it was you liked her best; but it was in these frequent changes, and in the act of changing, that she betrayed herself.

At first she would be all attention, and look as grave as a judge. Then, by degrees, she gave up even the pretence of listening, and would sit down to chess with Chub. He, poor fellow, dreadfully in earnest, and hesitating over his moves in a way which gave a pretty sure indication of approaching defeat; she, dashing away at tangents to every accepted rule, and from time to time interrupting the conversation with some little playful exclamation, which was only redeemed from being silly by the little wise air with which it was said, and the rosy pouting lips which gave it utterance. Then, now and again, she would open her eyes as if in wonder, and look straight at Sir Francis, just as he was in the midst of one of his pet theories. There was no mistaking the meaning of that look; it said as clearly as words could have done:

"Why do you talk so much about all these dry, disagreeable things, and waste your thoughts upon all sorts of people, when—" She never seemed to get further than the "when," for just at that moment Chub would be sure to do something to attract her attention, and so the sentence was never finished. But who could meet such a glance from those bright, blue, speaking eyes, and not be moved? Sir Francis was greatly moved; he had never seen such eyes before, and they were seldom out of his thoughts. But alas! alas for Sis! It was impossible to be in her company day after day without finding her out. Before the winter was over Sir Francis had discovered she was acting a part—a part so pretty that it was almost difficult to wish she would not act it; but still in the end, if there be only time, the real will gain the victory over the false: and so Sir Francis, tearing his heart, as it were, from Deepdale, sought some other shrine upon which to lay it—for it is difficult for young hearts to remain in their own keeping. He did not seek long before he became attracted—and what more natural, knowing how beautiful she was—to Allegra.

But here it would only be right to say,

that of all this nothing whatever was known to anybody but himself, for the young ladies themselves had not as yet found out whether he had a heart or not. And if it be objected that this easy transfer of the affections is somewhat damaging to the reputation of a young man of Sir Francis Hawthorne's acknowledged strength of character, it should be remembered that to be true to nature we must take things as we find them ; and after all is it not the case that it is he who endeavours to seek out, and love the best, who is the most worthy of being loved, even though he may have to flutter round a few flowers before he is able to find out, which is the best?

Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that for a short time Geraldine's image was the one which presented itself most frequently, whether in thought by day or in dreams by night, to Sir Francis. But it was not long before strange suspicions, like drops of gall in honey, embittered his cup of happiness. He began to ask himself ugly questions: "Was she not too masculine in her tastes? Was she not too flippant? Could she be sympathetic? and to each of these ugly questions an answer came but too readily; and

for the moment Sir Francis was made unhappy, for an internecine warfare was raging between his heart and his head, and it was difficult to say which would conquer. There was something about Geraldine which made him love her despite himself, and when she was in one of her graver moods, and looked thoughtfully out of those beautiful eyes, while she spoke in a low musical voice on subjects which might have been deemed far too deep and dry for her to have felt any interest in, and spoke on them, too, as if she had thoroughly thought them out, how was it possible for him not to love her?

But in her other moods!

Ah me! what a change! Exchanging silly badinage with silly young men; laughing when she ought to have looked grave; assuming masculine airs, and talking about horses as if she had been brought up in the stables, and of betting and the odds like an officer of dragoons. Ah me! what a change! But when Sir Francis found her as he once did, in the smoking-room with her brother and some college friends, a smoking-cap on her head and a cigarette in her mouth, the great crisis came, the internecine war was brought to an end by the head winning a

great victory over the heart, and Sir Francis found himself once more free.

Winter was gone, the spring had passed away, and it was now summer.

Ostensibly, no change had taken place in the relations between Sir Francis and the family at the Court, and there were many days when he was to be found, racket in hand, with Geraldine at his side, doing battle against the redoubtable Chub, assisted by the still more redoubtable Sis, whilst Victoria and Eva sat under the shade of a leafy chestnut-tree and watched the game; for Eva was too delicate for any kind of violent exercise, and although Victoria could play, and played well, she did not care much about the game, and only took a part in it when she was wanted.

"How well Sir Francis plays!" remarked Eva.

"Very," answered Victoria, absently, as if she were thinking of something else.

Then a silence of some minutes; again broken by Eva:

"Have you not observed that he has very much changed of late?"

"Who — I?" asked Victoria. "Why? What makes you think so?"

She spoke in a startled, hurried manner,

and plucked almost fiercely at the petals of an ox-eye daisy as she did so.

"Because," said Eva, calmly, "he used to talk so much more; and Geraldine and he were always teasing each other."

"Don't they do so now?"

"Oh no! never! He, is all politeness; and she, is never rude. It is nothing but 'If you please,' and 'Thank you'."

"How tiresome!" said Victoria; she might perhaps have said more, but at this moment Lady Arabella joined them, followed by a manservant carrying her own special easy-chair and a plentiful supply of pillows, with which, in a few minutes, with the assistance of Eva and Victoria—for Lady Arabella never did anything without assistance—she was carefully propped up.

A pause in the game brought the players around her.

"Ah, Sir Francis," she said, as the young baronet approached her, "you really must be prevented from putting your theories into practice. If you go on as you are doing, we shall all be ruined."

"Ah, poor me! What have I done now?" said Sir Francis, with an air of mock humility.

"Only by your insisting upon paying higher wages than anyone else, you have created universal discontent. You will hardly believe it, but not less than three of Mr. Yorke's farm people have left him during the last month, in order, as the foolish creatures say, to better their condition. And you know," she continued, turning to Geraldine, "how kind your papa has been to them."

"How ungrateful!" said Geraldine; "but we must not expect gratitude from the lower classes; they are getting worse and worse every day."

"Are *we* getting better?" asked Eva.

"My dear Penserosa," said her mother, "that is not the question; it does not matter whether *we* are getting better or worse, but you must allow that in no country in the world is so much money given away in charity as in ours."

"Because," observed Sir Francis, "there is no country in the world in which charity is so much needed. For that reason I look upon charity as a disgrace to us. It ought to be the duty of the rich to seek to prevent its need, rather than to alleviate the misery which proceeds from need."

"Utopian!" said Lady Arabella, playfully

threatening him with her fan; "as indeed you Radicals always are."

"But, mamma dear," said Eva, "I think Sir Francis has forgotten that there always must be poor, for are we not told that the poor will always be with us? and I cannot see why we should not help them in such a manner as to make them love us."

Lady Arabella shook her head mournfully, as if she would have said: "I have tried, but it is hopeless."

"What nonsense, Eva!" said Geraldine, sharply; "people cannot be *made* to love each other."

"True," said a voice, in clear, measured tones; "for there can be no true love without sympathy."

Sir Francis looked up at the speaker—it was Victoria—and as he did so, his eyes met hers.

He had never looked into them before. What a depth of tenderness they revealed! How was it he had overlooked the possessor of them till now? True, he had very frequently seen her and often spoken to her, but she had appeared to him only as a reserved, silent girl, who seemed to live amongst her books and in communion with her own

thoughts. But then he had been so much engrossed, first by little Sis, and secondly—it is sad to think of such fickleness—by Geraldine.

"There can be no true love without sympathy."

Could Victoria have foreseen the effects of those few words she might perhaps have remained silent. Would it have been better for her to have done so? Who can tell?

From that moment Sir Francis was more than ever at Deepdale.

"We understand each other," said the doctor; "you know the adage: birds of a feather flock together."

"Poor fellow! he is so dull at home," said Mrs. Pringle.

"It is all that beautiful pet curl Sis has been training over her left eyebrow," said Chub.

"If it were not wicked, I should call you names, sir," cried Sis.

"Am I not right, Vic?" asked Chub.

But Chub asked in vain, for Victoria made him no answer. Yet her heart was full, and she felt her cheeks flush at Sir Francis's name. She knew why he was so often at Deepdale. His admiration—his love had been suddenly

revealed to her: how, she could scarcely tell, for as yet he had said no word of either.

The last few weeks had indeed produced a great change in the feelings of both. It was a marvel now to Sir Francis that he had ever looked with admiration on any other form than hers; that he had ever sought to catch the glances of any other eyes; or that he had ever hung on the words from any other lips. It was true that Victoria had not the captivating graces of Sis, nor the undeniable beauty of Geraldine—though there was a strong resemblance between them—but then she had the charm, which they had not, of being always the same, and of making the time spent in her society a source of profit as well as of pleasure, for when she spoke she seemed to do so out of the fulness of her convictions, and to lay bare a heart which was incapable of guile.

True, she might not be strictly beautiful, but she was certainly very handsome; and it seemed as if she grew more and more so every day. The sad look was fast fading away, and the dark eyes were more frequently relieved from the shade of their long lashes as she looked towards him—not shyly now — but with a glance which expressed trust and in-

terest, and—why should it not be said?—love. Why she knew not, but now it was for the first time that she seemed to gain an insight into her own heart. Life, which for some mysterious reason had always appeared to her so unreal, so full of littleness, so disappointing, suddenly assumed a new aspect. She was not old, but it seemed as if she had lived so long, and now—at last—at last! It was no idle fancy, no foolish dream of youth, no fevered fantasy of a morbid imagination. No, no; it was true—so true: she was loved, and loved by one who was worthy of her love.

No wonder that her eyes were brighter, that a blush of red had mantled her pale cheek, that her carriage had become more erect, her step more buoyant; that her heart beat stronger. How could it not be so, when she loved and was beloved?

Yes: she had known of this love, even before it had taken the form of words, and yet when Sir Francis did speak of it, though she could have wished those words to have dwelt upon his lips for ever, it came upon her as a surprise.

They were walking side by side at the time. She stopped, looked up at him, put her hand in his, and said:

"If I could speak to you now as I would wish to speak I should be inexpressibly happy. As it is, I can only ask you to bear with me for a few days; it will be my birthday then, and I have promised the kind doctor to remain free till after I am nineteen; and I must try and keep my promise, though I fear I have been sadly forgetful of it of late."

"A few days?" said Sir Francis. "It is such an age to wait!"

"But I may have to say 'No,'" said Victoria, disengaging her hand, but not before Sir Francis had pressed it—it is not necessary to say how many times—to his lips.

"You would not be so cruel as to make me miserable——"

"Please don't speak of being miserable," said Victoria; "it is a bad omen."

"Are you superstitious?"

"I am sometimes."

"But during these horrible few days—may I come as usual?"

"Yes, if you will promise to be very wise and very good, and not talk of love."

"Remember, I am more than nineteen, and am under no promise to remain free. I am a slave."

"Is love, then, such a bondage?" asked Victoria, archly.

"Yes!" said Sir Francis, "from which there is no escape; and the sweetest of all sounds is the chink of its chains."

"Come," said Victoria; "remember the first duty of a slave is obedience. I order you to be silent—and for the next few days I free you from your fetters."

"And when these few days are over?"

"The bann of silence shall be taken off, and you shall have fresh chains."

"Let me wear them for ever," said Sir Francis. "Liberty has become hateful to me."

"It seems to me that we are talking great nonsense," said Victoria, as she turned in the direction of the house.

And for the next few days Victoria had to play a part; she dared not show her happiness.

The only person who observed it was Mrs. Pringle.

"How well Victoria is looking," she said. "I am so glad I advised her to take camomile tea."

She did not know that Victoria had not followed her advice.

CHAPTER IX.

MIDSUMMER EVE.

Oh, how sweet it is this soft midsummer evening! The air redolent of nature's purest perfumes; the sky without a cloud; the moon rising lazily and round; the stars awaiting her in pale expectancy; silence, broken but by a fountain's plash.

On such a night as this loving hearts commune without words, and wreaths are woven by Fancy for the Future's wear.

On such a night as this the world would seem to sleep, and we, who are but as the watchers by its couch, to dream. Oh, golden dreams, which woo us in our youth, and with fleet footsteps fly from us in age!

The doctor has been called away to a patient; Chub and Sis are lawn-tennising at the Court, and will not be back till late, as they intend to walk. Mrs. Pringle is at

home, for she can be seen through the French window which opens on the lawn, seated at her work-table, and thoroughly engrossed in one of her favourite complications in wool.

Victoria, too, is at home, for as the moon rises an observer on the lawn might have seen her shadow distinctly outlined on the gravel-walk. She is sitting on a rustic seat, and is evidently not alone, for there is another and a larger shadow by the side of, and bending over towards hers—the shadow of Sir Francis Hawthorne.

Since Sir Francis had declared his love they had met each day, but this was the first time they had been alone.

For some time neither of them had spoken, then the silence was broken by Sir Francis.

"Why is it, Victoria," he said, "that we are so little disposed to talk when we are most happy? Now, because I am sitting by you, it seems as if the sense of happiness had so taken possession of my whole being that every other faculty had been destroyed. You must forgive me for being so stupid, for it is love which has made me so."

"Hush!" said Victoria. "Remember you

are in the position of a cardinal whose mouth has not yet been opened. But why should we wish to talk when we are happy! It has always seemed to me that the highest happiness is that for which there can be found no words; just as with grief, those who mourn most, neither weep nor wail."

There was again a long pause. It was Victoria who now spoke.

"I do not know why it is," she said, "but there is something either in the darkness, or in the stillness, of the night which makes me melancholy, even when my heart is most full of joy."

"It cannot be the darkness," said Sir Francis, "for see how brightly the moon is now shining; it has almost turned night into day."

"Ah! The moon, the moon," repeated Victoria, dreamily. "I sometimes think it is the moon which exerts such a strange influence over me. It looks so pale—so sad. Do you not think," she added hurriedly, as she turned her eyes towards it, "that it looks very sad? Oh, so sad! As if it had been a silent witness of all the sin and wickedness committed on the earth."

"You must not give way to such thoughts,

my dear Victoria. If looking at the moon makes you melancholy, turn from it. Think of how Nature revels in the brightness of the sun. There is a sun for each and all of us, as well as moon."

"Ah!" said Victoria, mournfully. "But I am one of the children of the moon." Then, suddenly changing her tone, she asked quickly, "Tell me, are you a believer in dreams?"

"'Only in one," said Sir Francis; "and that, I feel, will come true."

"But, tell me truly."

"No, certainly not," said Sir Francis.

"But I have heard some wonderful instances of their being realised," said Victoria. "However, I agree with you, though it is very singular—very singular."

"What is singular?" asked Sir Francis.

"When I was a child I had a dream which has haunted me to this day, and I saw you in it. A strange dream, which has sometimes made me very unhappy."

"Dear little dreamer!" said Sir Francis, pressing her hand, which he had been holding in his own for the last ten minutes. "Dear little dreamer, remember dreams come by contraries; and when to-morrow comes, and

you have made me happy, you shall prove that it is so."

"I cannot tell you how I dread to-morrow," said Victoria. "I never knew before that I was so weak. Ah! can it be my fancy?" she cried, as she shrank back and trembled violently.

"What is it, darling?" asked Sir Francis, as he put his arm around her waist and drew her towards him.

"See! see!" she cried, as she pointed in the direction of the orchard; "it is the second time I have seen it—and all in white."

"Sweet one, be calm; it is but the moonlight streaming through the trees;" he stooped down and kissed her on her forehead as he spoke.

There was a shout.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Home at last. I hope you have not eaten all the supper, for I am as hungry as a hunter."

It was Chub and Sis. Chub vowing that he would play lawn-tennis no more. "Only fancy," he said, "having to jump about the whole afternoon with that baboon Duke showing his white teeth and grinning at you from the other side of the net!"

"I only wish you were half as good-look-

ing," said Sis; "don't you?" This last was addressed to Victoria, who, with Sir Francis, had advanced to meet them. "But, good gracious, child! how pale you look!"

"It is only the moonlight," said Victoria.

"The moon," said Chub, "I hate moons, and moon-calves too, Sis, even though they may be more good-looking than I am!"

"Silence, sirrah!" said Sis, as full of all sorts of conflicting sentiments they walked into supper together.

The doctor came in before it was over; he was even more cheery than usual.

"I was just in time," he said; "a few minutes more and he would have bled to death."

"What was it?" asked Sir Francis.

"Tom Bates," said the doctor. "He was stupid enough to get entangled in the threshing machine, and so will have to go through life with one hand less than his neighbours."

"How long did it take you to cut it off?" asked Chub.

"Twice as long as I ought to have been," said the doctor; "for I am sadly out of practice."

"Oh, papa! how can you do such horrid things!" exclaimed Sis.

"You foolish little puss," said the doctor, "if no one could do what you are pleased to call horrid things, this would be a remarkably unpleasant world for some of us to live in."

"I suppose you know, Sis, what is supposed to be the most difficult operation in surgery?" said Chub.

It was not the first time Chub had asked Sis the same question. She looked at him scornfully.

"I wish, Chub," she said, "that you would not be so fond of slang."

"What did I say?" asked Chub. "As for slang, I should like to know where a fellow is to be found more slangy than Duke."

"Is Duke at home now?" asked Mrs. Pringle.

It was the first time she had spoken.

"Yes, mamma," said Sis, blushing; "he is going to stay three weeks."

"In that case we must ask him over," said Mrs. Pringle.

"Let me have fair notice, my dear, that I may be out," said the doctor. "I hate prigs."

"You hear, Sis?" said Chub.

"Come, come, Chub," said the doctor, "I cannot allow you to tease your sister. I will have none of my privileges infringed upon. —But what is the matter, Sir Francis? I have not heard your voice since we have sat down. And as for Vic, she has evidently put on her thinking-cap; perhaps it is that she begins to be oppressed by the burden of age, for sweet eighteen is nearly past. And to-morrow, well, to-morrow we must have a feast, mind that, mother, and we will drink her health in a bumper of the old Johannisberg, for I always think, teetotaler as I nearly am, that the best of drinking is when there is a toast in the cup. What say you, Sir Francis? Will you come?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Sir Francis.

"And mind you bring a good appetite," said Mrs. Pringle, "for I can promise you a good dinner. But, remember, the doctor is responsible for the wine."

"The women always throw the heaviest responsibility on our shoulders," said the doctor, "cunning creatures that they are; you will find that out to your cost one of these days, Sir Francis."

"The sooner the better," said Sir Francis.

"I can't think how a man can be such a fool as to marry," said Chub; at which wise remark Sis exclaimed, saucily:

"Sour grapes." And the doctor laughed.

"But really, Vic," he said, "you must cheer up, or instead of a birthday-feast you will make us all think it is an entertainment in honour of somebody's funeral."

"Is it really to-morrow?" said Victoria. "Then I have a favour to ask—let me have to-morrow to myself. Remember that to-morrow I shall be nineteen."

"Ah! how stupid of me, I had forgotten," said the doctor, looking unusually grave. "You are quite right. So we will ask our friend here to come to the celebration of your 'natal anniversary' a day later. And now" —as he saw Sir Francis rising to take leave —"we must all off to bed, for I see that some of us want it, and you, my dear Vic, as much as any."

"Then, the day after to-morrow," said Sir Francis, as he shook hands all round, and, of course by accident, with Victoria twice.

As he rode over the hill which stood midway between Hawthornedene and Deepdale, and from which both houses could be seen, he reined in his horse and gazed long and wist-

fully in the direction of Deepdale. A single light showed that one of its inmates was still astir; his heart told him it was Victoria.

Her sadness seemed to have communicated itself to him, and it was difficult to believe that the solitary horseman who peered anxiously through the darkness at that distant light, could be a suitor waiting for a verdict from one of whose love he could not have the smallest doubt.

"But this intense dejection?" he asked himself. "This fear of to-morrow? Can it be the shadow which coming events are ever said to cast before them?"

He had reached Hawthornedene before he had found an answer to the question; and as he dismounted his expression was so unlike what it usually was, that even the servants were struck with it, and said amongst themselves they thought their master must be ill.

The shadow had fallen upon him as well as upon Victoria.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING FOR THE VERDICT.

"I KNOW we are going to have a thunder-storm," said Mrs. Pringle, as she sat down to breakfast the next morning, "for I feel such a swimming in my head."

"Pish!" said the doctor. "Pish" was a favourite word of his whenever anyone presumed to speak of their ailments in his presence without consulting him. "Pish! my dear. Pish!"

"I only wish you had it, John; but no, indeed I don't, for you men make such a fuss about trifles. But my head swims all the same."

"Too much tea," said the doctor. "How can you women expect not to have pains and aches when you treat your nerves as if they were harp-strings, and always have some kind of tuning-fork at work, either screwing them

up or letting them down? But where is Victoria?"

The door opened as he spoke. It was not Victoria, but Sis.

"Papa," she said, "Vic has a bad headache, and I am going to take her a cup of tea; but she told me to tell you she will be down soon, and that she particularly wishes to see you before you go out."

"A headache!" said the doctor. "Why, wonders will never cease. Vic with a headache!"

"It is all the thunder in the air," said his wife."

The doctor knew it was impossible to overcome Mrs. Pringle in argument, for although she did not say much, she always insisted upon having the last word; so he contented himself with an almost inaudible "Pish!" and went on with his breakfast.

After breakfast, Victoria came down, looking pale and agitated. She still complained of headache, and answered with a faint smile the kind congratulations of her friends.

"Now to business," said the doctor. "Come with me, my dear, into the library." He put on much the same grave, serious air he would have assumed had he been about

to perform some difficult operation, and was somewhat doubtful as to the result. "Come with me, my dear."

When he had closed the library-door he went to his writing-table, and opening a drawer, took from it a packet of letters carefully tied together. Amongst them was one with a large black seal. This he handed to Victoria.

"I must now carry out your poor old aunt's wishes. Sit down, my dear child, and read this. But before you do so, summon up all the courage, all the fortitude which belongs to you, for although I have no exact knowledge of what the letter contains, I have every reason to believe there is much in it of a very painful nature. Remember, my dear, that many circumstances by which our lives are influenced are utterly beyond our control; and that whilst the weak are often overwhelmed and destroyed by them, they can be made a source of good, a blessing, to the strong. Since you have been under my roof I have never ceased to endeavour to give strength to your character; show me now that my labour has not been thrown away. Promise the poor bungling old doctor, as the greatest favour you can

confer upon him, that you will be strong and of good heart."

Victoria threw her arms round his neck.

"My kindest best of friends," she said, "I will do my best, and trust you will not be disappointed in me. But for the rest of the day I would be alone—quite alone, for I foresee I shall have much to suffer."

All that day Victoria remained in her room. To the frequent and anxious inquiries of Mrs. Pringle there was but one reply:

"She was not feeling quite well, and wished to be quiet."

"Ought you not to see her?" suggested Mrs. Pringle to the doctor. "I really fear she is seriously ill."

"My dear," said her husband, "in that case we will have a little patience, and see what my great rival Dame Nature may do."

Sis could not understand it. Why should Vic shut herself up in her room on her birthday, of all days in the year? She thought it very extraordinary.

"Why should she not have a headache?" said Chub. "Eva often has."

"You are always talking about Eva," said Sis.

"I'm sure I don't talk or think more about

Eva than anybody else," said Chub, growing red.

"Sour grapes," said Sis.

"I don't understand you, with your sour grapes," said Chub, growing redder still.

"Poor boy!" said Sis.

"I am not a boy," said Chub, angrily. "I was nineteen last week; in another month I shall be walking the hospitals, and I am at all events twice the man of that jackanapes Duke."

"Remember, he is Eva's brother," said Sis.

"And my sister's pet," said Chub.

"Sir, how dare you!" It was the turn of Sis to get angry now.

The doctor interposed.

"Come, come, children! what is all this about?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir," said Chub; "a mere storm in a teacup."

"Then, my boy, after a storm let there be a calm, for I hate jangling. Why, Sis, my little puss, come here; what has made you blush so? I declare you are as red as a peony."

"Never mind," said Chub. "You know what a good-natured fellow you have for a brother—I won't tell."

"Papa, I wish you would beat him," cried Sis. "I am not strong enough, or I would do it myself."

"You had better beat some one else," said Chub; "then it would be so nice making it up with a kiss for each blow."

"You provoking boy!" cried Sis, as she ran out of the room.

The next morning Victoria still remained in her room. Through Sis, who had found her door fastened, she sent down a request that her breakfast might be brought her; and the servant who took it to her returned with a slip of paper for the doctor, on which was written: "Come to me. I am ready to see you now. I wish you to know all."

The doctor went to her room, and more than an hour elapsed before he returned.

"Mother," he said to his wife, in a voice which still bore traces of emotion, "Sir Francis will not dine here to-day, our birthday dinner must be put off. Vic, though better, is still suffering from a nervous attack, which will necessitate great care and quiet for some days."

"Is it infectious?" asked Mrs. Pringle. "There is plenty of carbolic acid."

"Pish!" said the doctor, ringing the bell, and

giving a note to the servant with directions that it should be sent at once to Sir Francis Hawthorne's.

"Dear me, what a pity!" said Mrs. Pringle; "and I have got such a beautiful salmon."

When the messenger reached Hawthornedene, he found Sir Francis pacing the chestnut avenue, which formed one of the approaches to the house, in a state of feverish impatience, not unmixed with anxiety. He could not tell why, but he had never felt so ill at ease. The pale, sad face of Victoria had haunted him even in his dreams.

"Why so sad? Why so sad?" he had kept repeating to himself.

He had gone to bed late, and had risen early. The sun had scarcely topped the distant hills, when, in all the solitude of early morn, he had whistled to his dogs and sallied forth. Ah, how beautiful is this world of ours to those whose hearts are full of love!

As he walked rapidly along the path which led in the direction of the midway hill, at every step his pulse beat quicker, his hopes rose higher; at every step the air seemed purer, the perfume of the dew-steeped flowers sweeter. It was as if he drew in new life

with every breath : as if another heart were beating responsive to his own.

As he neared the summit of the hill, he was obliged to stop for a few minutes to recover breath, so rapid had been his upward course. Then, passing through the clump of fir-trees which crowned it, he threw himself down upon the dew-dank grass, forgetful of all else but that Deepdale, embowered in trees and bathed in a flood of sunlight, stood in the vale before him.

But he thought not of Deepdale. It wsa with him as with the miser who heeds not the casket which enshrines his gems, and thinks but of the priceless pearl within.

"O God, let her be mine!—be mine!—be mine! And make me worthy of the gift!" was all his morning prayer.

The wind sighed out an answer through the trees. It seemed to him as if he had heard a moan.

"Victoria!" he cried.

The echo of the moan had fled, but from the silence came an answering wail.

He could remain no longer, but fleeing, as it were, from his own thoughts, hastily retraced his steps. By degrees he became calmer, so that he was able to go through his

usual routine of morning work; but what he did, he did mechanically; he continued to move restlessly about from place to place; and so it was without aim or object that he was walking in the chestnut walk when the doctor's groom had met him.

Even before the groom had touched his hat and turned away, Sir Francis had torn open the letter.

It was from the doctor, enclosing one from Victoria. Alas! his worst fears were confirmed.

The doctor's letter, though short, was kind and sympathetic. With much warmth of feeling, he regretted he had not sooner known all the circumstances which had led Victoria to decide that it was her duty to act in a manner which must necessarily be the cause of great pain to both; for then he most certainly would have exercised greater caution, and have prevented their being thrown so much together—but it was too late for useless regrets. As it was, he could only beseech him, by every sentiment of affection he might entertain for his ward, to abstain from any attempt to alter her decision, for he felt that it was, and ought to be, irrevocable.

Sir Francis staggered to the nearest seat;

he held Victoria's unopened letter in his hand, but it was as if he had not courage to read it.

"How strange!" he murmured; "now that I feel there is no hope, I love her ten thousand times more dearly than I did before! But is there no hope?"

He opened the letter slowly, almost reluctantly, as he said this, and read as follows:

"My dear Sir Francis,

"If I were to try, I should be unable to find words in which to tell you all that I have felt—all that I now feel. I know not why, but I had a presentiment that the one bright day-dream of my life would not be realised—and so it is. I shall never marry. I *must* not be your wife. In the future, you will be the happier for this; and the time will come when I trust we may both be enabled to meet as firm and—why should I not write the word?—loving friends. Try to find one more worthy of your love—I will promise to be to her as a sister. The last few hours have seemed to me a life. I have learned so much—so much, alas! that I would not have known. Yet I thank God that it is even as it is. To have had your

love will be something more than a mere meteor across my path, leaving no trace; it shall be to me as the recollection of the cloud of fire to the Israelites of old, and I trust that I may have strength given me to the end—to show—that I was worthy of it: strength given me to perform in all things, as in this, my duty. Let me be enabled to think of you as of one to whom I may look for help as from a brother; but it is better that for some *long* time we should not meet. Till then, help me by your example. Till then, farewell. Think of me as

"Your faithful friend,

"VICTORIA."

Within three weeks, Sir Francis, to the astonishment of all the world of Middleshire, announced his intention of starting immediately on a lengthened tour—it was given out, for the purpose of making himself acquainted with all those various conditions of human life which, to the observant traveller, form such a never-ending source of instruction and amusement. But there were some who shook their heads; and Mr. Mortimer was heard to observe, with a significant air:

"Well, well, we've a right to look forward

to something more aristocratic than a baronet, and when we quarter ourselves with our husband's arms, to find something better than a dirty red hand."

One thing was very certain: Geraldine had been for some time looking, for her, unusually grave, and from some unaccountable cause—though the doctor was supposed to know the reason why—the Pringle family were less with the Yorkes' than usual.

It was shortly after Sir Francis had sailed, that Victoria entered into training, as a nurse, in St. Tobias's Hospital, where she threw herself into her work with an energy which had gained her much commendation from all those with whom she had been brought into contact. The matron said she was invaluable. The secretary, that she was an honour to the institution; and Professor Sharpe, that "she had more *nous* in her little finger than half the students in their whole united brain-boxes."

CHAPTER XI.

RIGHT OR WRONG?

"COME, come, my little man; you are looking glum. That won't do; you must laugh."

My "little man" was a plump urchin of some four years old, lying on his back on a small bed, which was one of some thirty other small beds, each one of which had its small tenant, in a spacious ward in St. Tobias's Hospital; and my "little man" had his large black eyes fixed somewhat ruefully on the point of his great toe, for his right leg—it was the old story: run over by a cab—had been broken, and in order to dry the gum bandage in which it had been placed the leg had been hoisted up to a kind of tripod, in such a way that his foot was considerably higher than his head.

Thus it was that "my little man," utterly amazed by the variety of incidents which had

so suddenly crowded themselves into his little life, and not the least astonishing of which was the elevation of his great toe to such an unwonted height, was lost in perplexity, and continued to gaze upon it with a sad and mournful interest. It was as if he were not quite sure whether it was his own great toe or the great toe of some one else, placed there for his amusement; and this state of uncertainty and doubt had so worked upon his feelings that while his curiosity, not unmixed with a certain degree of apprehension, was intensely excited, the sense of pain was almost entirely lost.

"Come, come, my little man, you must laugh."

The voice in which this was said was so sweet and pleasant, there was such a sympathetic ring in every word, that the little fellow gave up for the moment the contemplation of his toe, and turned his dark lustrous eyes, as if perforce, full upon the speaker.

There must have been something in her to complete the favourable impression produced by her voice, for the mournful expression of the child's face passed away as if it had been a cloud, and a little roguish smile

took its place, which said as clearly as a little roguish smile could: "Is not all this very funny?"

"Good boy!" said the nurse, nodding approvingly.

"Bravo! well done, Victoria!" said Dr. Pringle, who had entered unobserved, as he held out his hand. "I wish some of the fond mothers I wot of were here, to learn the difference between the real sympathy, which strengthens and cheers, and the spurious, maudling sympathy, which weakens and spoils. I congratulate you: when we can make our patients laugh we have not much to learn. But I must not gossip; I am in a great hurry, and I only looked in to tell you that I hope that everything is satisfactorily arranged, and that you will be able to do all you want at Zurich."

He had no time for more, for at that moment the matron and Professor Sharpe entered the ward.

Now the professor was an old friend of Dr. Pringle's, though, considering they had been partly educated together and belonged to the same profession, it was remarkable how few ideas they had in common.

A thin, angular, somewhat bilious-looking

little man was the professor, with an incisive, cutting manner, perfectly in keeping with his name. He had the misfortune of being just three inches shorter than he considered he ought to have been, and so irritated was he against Dame Nature for her ill-treatment of him in this matter that it would have been extremely disagreeable for that worthy dame had she fallen into his practised professional hands, for he would most assuredly have made her pass a remarkably *mauvaise quart d'heure.*

Not that the professor was naturally unamiable; quite the reverse. But how is it to be expected that a man can be in the best of tempers who never ceases to be conscious of being just three inches under the five feet ten he had fixed upon as his proper height, and who is under the necessity of rising upon his toes—as the professor perpetually did at the interval of a few seconds—in order to assert himself and preserve his proper position in society.

It was this want of height which made the professor hate tall people, and woe to the students with long legs, for it was upon them that he was ever ready to pour out the vials of his wrath. A singular contradiction this,

considering how very much he disliked being short himself! However, so it was, and you could not be in the professor's society many minutes without finding out his weak point.

Next to his hatred of tall people was his intense dislike to women who did not "keep their proper places." He spoke of them with the same contempt as he did of tall men, and spoke to them as he indeed did to all women —but one—as if they were intelligent babies who had been permitted to increase in size. And here again he was guilty of another strange inconsistency; for though he constantly dilated on one of his pet theories, that no woman should be allowed to think, he secretly paid the greatest deference to the opinions of the matron, Mrs. Wainscott, though when he acted upon them he always made it appear he was merely following out his own.

Mrs. Wainscott herself, though trained in a school which made her readily accept the position of inferiority assigned to her sex, and so strongly insisted upon by the professor, was a remarkable instance of the amount of beneficial work which may be effected in a large institution by a clever, energetic woman. Everything over which she had charge was in

perfect working order. The discipline of the nurses left nothing to be desired. The wards were models of comfort, cleanliness, and order, and apart from the skill of the medical officers, much of the reputation which belonged to St. Tobias was due to her watchful, sympathetic care, and to her great administrative ability.

And yet it was supposed by Professor Sharpe—and all those Professor Sharpes who are to be found in the world under other names—that she had no right to think!

But in order that there may be no misapprehension as to his views—for it is no light matter to deal unjustly with the character of such a man as Professor Sharpe—it will be as well to state them in his own words, thus:

"Do as you will"—the professor has raised himself to the very point of his toes as he utters emphatically the last word—"Do as you will, you never can teach the woman to reason—that is, to think. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that a woman is unable to arrive at conclusions or decisions based upon motives equally with the man; but the motives themselves are arrived at by a totally different process; in the one case they are the outcome of a variety of factors working together in that great factory of

thought, the brain; in the other they are, as it were, spontaneous emotions emanating from structural causes, necessarily limited in their sphere of action. Thus it is we find that whilst the range of a man's thoughts are boundless, the woman's mind, as a rule—remember, I am not speaking of your exceptional monstrosities — the woman's mind, I repeat, is, as a rule, entirely occupied—apart from such thoughts as men choose to give her, for some special purpose—with the subject of dress, the choice of beef or mutton for her husband's dinner, or some one of the thousand and one trifles of which human existence is made up, and which I, for one, most certainly do not undervalue."

The only person to whom the professor did not care to enunciate his views on woman was his wife; for he had married very early in life a young lady so tall that when still in her teens she had been danced round by her schoolfellows on the first of May. She had considerably developed since that time, and the professor knew but too well that in her case, "spontaneous emotions emanating from structural causes" were not to be trifled with.

It was observed, too, that he never stood

upon his toes when his wife was present. She did not like it, and whatever question there might be as to the nature of her mind, there could be none as to the fact of her having a very strong will.

Surgery was the professor's passion, and he had the reputation of being a very skilful surgeon; but he cared more for the operation than the patient, and was not at all prepared to admit that recovery formed one of the chief elements of success.

His dexterity was a favourite theme of conversation amongst the pupils, and one of them had been once heard to remark that the sweetest thing in nature was to see Professor Sharpe handling the knife. Peace be to his ashes—for the professor is now dead.

"Ah! my good friend Pringle," said the professor, as he and the matron entered the room. "Just the very man. We were talking of you. You must put a stop to it. Mustn't he, Mrs. Wainscott?"

"At least, give me time to say—How d'ye do?" said the doctor, holding out his hand to the matron.

"Time is precious," said the professor; "not a minute to lose. Operation—amputation at the hip — splendid case! Will make my

tenth. Of course you'll come—all through obstinacy."

"Through what?" asked the doctor.

"Obstinacy," said the professor. "Injury in foot. Amputation necessary—would not submit. Spread to knee—still held out. Now, just in time—given in. A splendid case, under best possible conditions."

"It is a poor girl," said the matron, "whose friends interfered no less than three times the night before the operation was decided on, and now this is the last hope. It is very sad."

"Mrs. Wainscott," said the professor. "I have no time now. I must leave the doctor to you. You know my views. This great institution will suffer. It must be put a stop to. Pringle, your ward must not be allowed to make a fool of herself. You must prevent it. Women must keep to their own sphere. Now, for the present, good-bye; remember, I shall begin in half-an-hour. It's a first-rate chance. So mind you come."

The professor brought his heels down to the ground with a stamp, as he said this, made a pirouette, and walked off in the direction of an adjacent ward, leaving the doctor in charge of Mrs. Wainscott.

"Well, my dear madam?" said the doctor, interrogatively.

"I would much rather the professor had spoken to you himself," said the matron. "It is about Miss Marsh. Of course you know that she is going to leave the hospital?"

"Yes."

"And the object she has in view?"

"Certainly."

"May I ask if she is acting with your sanction?"

"She is old enough to judge for herself in this matter, and she is acting after due experience. There is therefore no reason why I should oppose her wishes."

"But, my dear sir, do you really think it is desirable that women should be doctors? Was it ever intended?"

"The first question I find no difficulty in answering. To the second I must confess being obliged to plead entire ignorance. But though I would answer the first question generally in the affirmative, I should prefer to qualify my opinion, and say that I can conceive cases in which it might not only be desirable, but very desirable that some women should be duly qualified for medical practice."

"But remember what girls will have to submit to in the course required from them. Will not their modesty suffer?"

"No more than it does at present, from what they have to see and do as nurses," said the doctor; "and I would ask if the natural repugnance which every girl of refined and delicate feelings must have to the performance of duties—which are often of the most repulsive and distressing nature—can be overcome through the influence of motives without which her work would be impossible, and if she can be prepared for, and do this work, with advantage rather than injury to her moral qualities, how much less likely is she to suffer when the object to be effected becomes greater, the interests deeper, and the preparation not one whit more objectionable than that which they have to undergo under your watchful care. Am I not right in this?"

Mrs. Wainscott was silent for a moment.

"There is certainly much truth in what you say. It may be prejudice, however, but I cannot reconcile myself to the idea; it seems unnatural."

"All new ideas do seem unnatural at first; but come, come, Mrs. Wainscott, said the doctor, kindly, "you are a practical woman, and the

work of this world can only be properly done by people who are so. Just look round at your poor little friends in this ward, and ask yourself what does a man doctor know about them? he does not even know their language. What is understood by every mother, by every woman with ordinary sympathies, is to him a sealed book; he has either to grope about in the dark, or seek out some woman to act as his assistant. Take the word of an old practitioner, that in almost all such cases the woman's diagnosis would be quicker, surer. Then as regards much of our practice with your own sex—dear me, dear me! Surely here all objection ceases?"

"But we women have no confidence in women," said the matron, laughing.

"We must educate your judgment, my good madam, and teach you to perceive that the best is the best whether it exhibits itself before the world in pantaloons or petticoats."

"But with regard to operations?" asked the matron.

"All medical men are not operative surgeons," said the doctor; "and I know of some—aye, and very good, useful fellows in their way—whom I would not trust to cut off the leg of a roast fowl. But allowing the

major surgical operations to remain more especially as a part of the man's work, there are hundreds of the minor ones which might be done as well, indeed more easily, and therefore better, by the women. Take the eye for instance, and those operations which require the use of very small and fine instruments: surely a woman would find less difficulty in handling them with her delicate and practised hands, than I possibly could with these great awkward thumbs."

The doctor held out his hands as he spoke; and there could be no doubt but that it could only be by great practice and extremely good management that they could be made to adapt themselves to any work which might require delicate manipulation.

"And yet," said the matron, "I have heard that you have used them very skilfully."

"I have done my best; one can do no more," said the doctor. "But I should like to know why a young girl, anxious to do good in her generation—who has mastered all the mystery of nursing, and overcome all the horror with which, until we are familiarised with it, the sight of much that the surgeon has to do produces—is to be doomed to stand

by everlastingly with a basin and sponge, when she may feel that she has something more in her, and when she is half inclined to say to some bungling operator—for there are bunglers in all professions—'Come, hold this, and let me take your place. I could do it in half the time, and twice as well myself'."

"Really, doctor," said the matron, "I must confess to being more than half converted."

"It will take time," said the doctor, "to reconcile the public to the change; but all honour to those who have the courage to become the pioneers in those unknown paths which become in time the frequented highways of human progress."

"But what shall I say to the professor?" asked the matron. "He will be furious."

"So much the better," said the doctor. "The more furious the gale, the sooner it is over. I would see him myself, but to-day I must be off at once. Will you kindly tell him, as he did not give me time to do so, that I have an engagement which will prevent me, much to my regret, being present in the theatre this morning?"

"Ah, poor thing! Poor thing!" said the matron.

It was evident that familiarity with dis-

tressing scenes had not hardened her heart, for, as the doctor took leave of her, her eyes were filled with tears.

A few minutes later, as the doctor was hurrying along Great George Street, on his way to the Park, he brushed against a tall, red-faced man, dressed in a suit of unmistakably sporting cut.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, lifting his hat.

The stranger growled a response—it almost sounded like an oath—as he passed on.

"How very odd," thought the doctor. "I certainly have seen that face before." He slackened his pace, as he reflected for a few moments. "I have it! I have it!" he said out loud. "What singular resemblances there are in this world! It is a disagreeable and bloated likeness of the good-looking youth whose portrait hung opposite the bed of my old friend Mrs. Marsh. Poor dear old soul! What a life of trial hers must have been!"

CHAPTER XII.

OUT IN THE RAIN.

It is evening. Cabs roll unceasingly towards the theatres. It rains, and hapless foot-passengers hail omnibuses in vain—they are all full to overflowing; and the conductors, so watchful and vociferous at other times, have assumed an air of dignified repose, and appear to be rather amused than otherwise at the idea of people being obliged to walk in a drenching shower. Walking is decidedly unpleasant—in the emphatic language of the period, "most awfully" so—for above it is all downpour and drip, whilst below, the water streams over the pavement in a way which makes the owner of a pair of water-proof shoes an envied man.

The shops are either closed or closing, though at distant intervals one is to be found open, whose owner, more greedy of gain, or

more impecunious than his neighbour, seeks to obtain the custom of those waifs and strays whose daily wants have not yet been supplied. By a stretch of imagination, and a slight departure from the truth, Regent Street, the Strand, and the other great thoroughfares may be said to be lighted; but when we turn off them into the narrow streets which form such an interminable network in the great metropolis, we should find but "darkness visible," were it not that here and there—and but too often here and there seem very close together—the street is made all ablaze by streams of light from gas-burners grouped together so regardless of expense, that the unsophisticated stranger who visits London for the first time would be struck with wonder at the unselfish liberality which prompts those whose aim is to minister to the simple wants of the multitude by the sale of beer and gin, to act as if gas were supplied gratis, and gas shares were not paying ten per cent. But without light what should we be in this world? Is not light the source of heat and life? We all have heard of the deeds of darkness, and it cannot be but with sentiments of honest pride that the Englishman who takes an interest in the welfare of his fellow-creatures, finds,

as he walks through the streets of London, evidences of the liberality with which this great blessing has been diffused—not by the Government, certainly not by the gas companies, not even by charitable societies, but by the private efforts of rich individuals and wealthy firms competing with each other in honourable rivalry, and amongst which will be found holding a forward place the time-honoured names of Souseman and Soppit.

Well do such names deserve to be emblazoned in green and gold on so many noble—or ignoble—houses, in letters so large that all who run can read! Virtue brings its own reward. The names of some of our greatest philosophers and men of science may remain unknown, but those of Souseman and Soppit have become household words.

Then, too, here and there we come upon streets which, as soon as Regent Street and the other great fashionable commercial thoroughfares have become dark, are lighted through their entire length by the lanterns—or more frequently tallow-candles, protected from the wind by paper shades—on the costermonger's trucks which line their entire length. In these streets the pavement is thronged with purchasers, now carefully

examining the wares which are temptingly spread out before them; now in what seems to be in noisy altercation with the dealers, but it is not so—it is merely the ordinary process by which purchases are made; with the uneducated of the Anglo-Saxon race, the choice of language is extremely small, so that in order to be emphatic, it is necessary to use strong and coarse expletives, to do the work of adjectives and other parts of speech, required, but unknown. All kinds of wares are exposed for sale on these trucks. Fish, vegetables, fruits, wearing apparel, hats and caps, boots and shoes, crockery and tin ware; indeed everything which might be likely to enter into the requirements of those who have but little money, and who weigh well every penny they spend. Many of the shops in the streets themselves are for butchers' meat, temptingly displayed, not in joints, or in any recognised form, but scraps heaped together, with the price—from one penny upwards—marked in large printed figures, stuck into them with skewers.

Some of these streets run parallel to, and within a very short distance of, the Strand; but how far apart with respect to all that is to be found in them! A few paces, and you

enter, as it were, into a different world. No handsome shops full of rich and tempting wares. No stream of well-dressed men and women passing onward, to and from distant quarters of the city—but squalor, filth, and degradation on every side.

At the time of which we speak, these streets have their crowds: they are filled with the denizens of the narrow courts and alleys; and these narrow courts and alleys teem with life —life made so hideous by poverty, neglect, drunkenness, debauchery, and disease, that it shuns, if it can, the light of day. The men are in their working-suits—most of them have none other—and bear upon their persons the toil-stains of the day, indeed of many days; for to be dirty has become a habit in some cases of life-long growth, and cleanliness is a word the signification of which is unknown. The women are equally shabby and unwashed. If husbands and wives are seen together, they are usually bent upon the same errand; for there is one point upon which they are in entire sympathy—in their love of drink. If the husband is in work and earns fair wages, so much the better for the beer-shop and the gin-palace. It is but so many more jugs of beer, pots of porter, and quarterns of gin; so

many more oaths and execrations; so many more kicks and cuffs.

But there is no amount of evil in this world out of which some good is not evolved. It is the drunkenness of these degraded wretches which gives elegance to the homes of the members of such respectable firms as Souseman and Soppit; and it might be fairly asked, were no one to be found patriotic enough to indulge freely in our national beverages and alcoholic drinks, how would it be possible to raise the large revenue which is mainly derived from them? How would it be possible for Great Britain to preserve her place amongst the powers of the earth? No, no! The end does sometimes justify the means; and to the judiciously educated mind it must always be quite clear, that if England be at this moment the great champion of liberty, the teacher of morality, and the leader of progress, it is to be attributed in no small measure to the indefatigable and devoted efforts of her capitalist brewers and distillers; in short, to her Sousemans and Soppits.

Rain, rain, rain! The clerk of the weather has evidently given orders for a wet evening—perhaps for a wet night. The would-be sellers are becoming drenched for little purpose, and

wheel off their barrows in despair ; whilst the would-be buyers take shelter at the hospitable bars of "publics," where comforting fluids are substituted for the solids they had intended to have purchased. The streets are no longer crowded, but there are dense clusters round the doors of these houses ; for it is an ill wind that blows no one good, and the publicans are driving a roaring trade.

"I wish you were in——" the word, an improper noun in common use, does not look well in print, so we will omit it—" and your brat too."

The speaker—his voice was harsh and husky —was a tall, dissipated-looking man, with a bloated, pimply face, dressed in a shabby suit of that unmistakable cut affected by men who frequent stables, and who like to speak of themselves as being fond of sport. As if to dispel all doubts on the subject, a gilt horse's head projected from a faded blue scarf wound tightly round his neck, and he walked with that peculiar circular gait which would seem natural to jockeys and postillions—that is to say, when postillions were, for the race is now nearly extinct—and gives the idea of their having ridden a long way, and of their still feeling extremely stiff.

A slender and delicate-looking woman was walking meekly by his side. It was to her he spoke. Her head had been bent down; but the last words were scarcely spoken than she stopped, drew herself up to her full height, and turned her pale face towards him—it still bore the traces of beauty—with a singular expression of mingled contempt, submission and fear. But if the former feeling made her eyes flash and her movements almost fierce, the latter soon predominated, and relapsing almost as quickly into her former attitude of dejection, she ejaculated—the depth of the struggle within was revealed by the way it was gasped out—the one word—

"Jack!"

"Jack!" The word was repeated in a strangely different key by a deep bass voice, which seemed to proceed from the inner depths of a burly, big-waistcoated man who had stepped up close behind them. A burly, jovial-looking man; at a first glance the personification of light-heartedness and good-humour; but a nearer examination disclosed an anxious, eager restlessness in the blood-shot eyes, which spake of a nature allied rather to that of the vulture than of the turtledove.

"Jack!" The word was the same. The same, but how unlike! In the one case it was full of expostulation, tinged with a shade of long-lost tenderness, made pathetic by the depth of its despair. In the other, it was as the voice of the spirit of evil, which, whether in whispers or in trumpet-tones, stirs up all that is latent within us, and appealing to the grosser senses, sets at naught all the nobler instincts of the heart.

The man turned.

"Ah, Trenton, you old scoundrel! It is you, is it? What are you doing out in this cursed wet? But I am devilish glad to see you; for I need not look twice to see that luck has changed."

"I believe you, my dear boy; and to give you a proof of it, come with me. I was on my way to look you up. I have a little supper on at the old place, and you look as if you wanted cheering. Confound this weather! It is enough to give the devil himself the blues. Ah! your wife! Madam, your humble servant. Unfortunately our rules do not admit ladies; but we will drink your health in a bumper."

"I am much obliged to you, sir; but I had rather my husband came home. It is so late."

"Ah, I see you like early hours—so do I—ha, ha! Jack—you shall be home early—in the morning. You may make your mind easy, my dear madam; your husband will be quite safe. God bless you! I should like to know who is not safe with Tom Trenton—honest Tom Trenton."

So saying, he placed his arm within her husband's, and with a deep bow of exaggerated politeness, walked his only too willing companion rapidly off in the opposite direction.

The woman stood for a few moments motionless. Her eyes were full of tears; she dashed them angrily away.

"God forgive me," she said, "for having ever loved him! I wish that I could hate him, but he has made me do worse, I loath and despise him! Pah!" saying this, with a gesture of disgust, she hurried onward.

She was sick at heart. The rain still fell in a heavy downpour. She was wet and cold.

One, two, three—she had all but passed the fourth of the brightly lit-up corner houses, from which there flowed a steady stream of ill-clad misery, seeking, and finding for a time, those bright visions of life which belong,

as realities, to those who have been enabled to tread its tangled paths with firm footsteps, or for whom fortune has had nought but smiles. But a few more steps and she is saved. No! See! she falters in her course! It is but for a moment, but moments are the turning-points of lives.

After months of brave battling against the ocean storms, the pilot but closes his eyes for an instant, and the ship is lost.

But it is not the storms of life which man has most to fear.

She is cold and wet, and sick at heart. It is a struggle either way. The weak body struggling with a still weaker will. Who could doubt the issue?

She had entered timidly, furtively, bowed down with a load of shame. She comes forth with a firm step, erect and almost radiant. Misery has no more dominion over her, for she feels as if she had ceased to think.

There is no sense of cold and chilliness now. She is all aglow; and as the blood courses in unwonted flow through her exhausted frame, it is as if she had renewed all the vigour and elasticity of her youth; and of all physical pleasures, what pleasure can be

compared to that which is produced by the sense of life when life is at its best?

Ah! who can wonder that the craving for drink becomes an irresistible impulse with the miserable? The apple offered to Eve was as nothing to this great temptation, for *she* was in Paradise, and these in a world where man has marred most of his Maker's works.

Still onward. It is but two streets more —but what streets! Even darker and dirtier than those that she has left. One of them, the narrowest of the two, is full of houses where a night's lodging can be had for a few pence, and many wet and hungry wretches are wending their way towards them. Wretches so destitute that they possess nothing beyond the foul and loathsome rags they carry on their backs. Wretches whose whole career might be summed up as—through the gin-palace to the grave.

Still onward! She has reached her goal at last. Panting and exhausted, she pauses on the threshold of a dirty ill-cared-for house. Reaction has now set in; she is more miserable than before; very cold, and very wet, and oh, how heart-sick!

She shakes off the wet which streams from her threadbare garments, and then, with a

convulsive shudder, enters a dark passage—the door of the house stood open—and gropes her way up a narrow flight of stairs to the second story. Then another pause; and as she leans against the wall for support, she gasps for breath, as if half suffocated by the fetid air which is the only atmosphere of the houses in these localities. At this moment the moon broke through a cloud, and in the light of the few stray beams which forced their way through a dirty paper-patched window, a pale worn face might have been seen turned heavenward, with that expression of intense anguish which belongs to despair.

Involuntarily a sob burst from her, as she turned and laid her hand upon the handle of the door near which she had been standing. It must have been heard by some one within; some one who, perhaps, had been awaiting her return, for almost at the same moment it opened, and she stood face to face with an old man whose gaunt form, wrapped up in the dingy folds of a faded flowered dressing-gown, stood out in bold, almost grotesque, relief, as he leant forward, and peering at her, made, with many significant gestures, some

whispered inquiry, of which the word "found" was alone audible.

"Of course not, Uncle, it never will be found. Come here, like a dear good boy, and don't be silly."

The answer came from a corner of the room near the fireplace. The speaker was a little girl who, though she was in truth older, did not look more than six years old. She was seated on a low stool near a chair, which, from the variety of articles placed upon it, evidently did duty as a table. She had soft, regular features, and a profusion of light-brown hair which flowed over her shoulders in a wild wavy mass, which in the fire-light —there was none else there—was tinged with red and flecked with gold.

The old man made no reply, but with a deep sigh walked meekly to an arm-chair by the side of the fire, opposite to where the child was seated; and as the light fell on his face, it was evident, from its shy, abashed expression, that he felt ashamed of having laid himself open to rebuke.

"Ah, mother!" said the child, "I am so glad you are come back. But the time has not seemed long, for dear old Uncle has been so good; he has been telling me of all

the beautiful sights I should have seen if God had only given me a pair of eyes like those He has given to other people."

She raised her head as she spoke, and as she did so the dull, lifeless orbs showed but too plainly that she was blind.

She paused for a moment, and then added —the voice was the same, but it quivered strangely as she spoke :

"But where is father ?"

The mother, who had been standing silently by the door, made no answer, but she stepped rapidly across the room, and kneeling down by the side of the child, threw her arms round her.

"Madge," she sobbed out, rather than spoke, "my angel—my guardian angel ! Oh, if I could but die !" and her voice became choked with tears.

The child looked up with a pained, puzzled look.

"Come here, dear old Uncle," she said, in her clear, silvery, soft voice. "Come here, I want you. Tell me what all this means. You are so strange ; father's so strange ; and now mother is strangest of all. But perhaps it is only poor me, because I have got no eyes like other people. Is not that it, dear Uncle?"

The old man had risen from his seat when appealed to. He shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, Madge—no!" he said; "it is not you, nor I, nor any of us. It is fate! It was written in the Book, and so 'twas lost. Ah, if I could but find it! If I could but find it!"

"Rubbish, Uncle dear!" said the silvery voice—"rubbish, or you would have told me long ago what it was you have lost. And what good is rubbish when it is found, I should like to know?"

"It was not rubbish, Madge!" said the old man, ruefully.

"But you know, Uncle dear, it must be all right if it were written in the Book."

"Tut—tut! I have my doubts," said a deep and solemn but somewhat cracked voice out of the darkness of the corner in which Madge sat, and near which her mother still remained, crouched and sobbing. "I have my doubts—have my doubts—my doubts—doubts!"

The voice gradually died away, as if too much doubting had made the speaker drowsy. But if so, the drowsiness must have been successfully resisted, for in a few seconds a peal of laughter rang through the room, and

with a preliminary whistle, as if to command attention, a sharp shrill voice called out in peremptory tones :

"Mum's the word. Don't tell the cats !"

"I tell you what, sir, if you don't go to sleep this very minute, I'll come and whip you," was Madge's response.

The threat seemed to have its proper effect, for the mysterious voice became silent after a few inarticulate sounds, which made it appear that sleep had overtaken the speaker whilst endeavouring to renew his solemn warning to the world at large against being on too confidential terms with—cats !

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAJOR'S "LITTLE GAME."

HONEST Tom Trenton—or as he was known in those happy moments when he was, as he expressed it, "basking in the blaze of Fortune's favour," "Major" Trenton—was in his glory. He was exercising the virtue of hospitality, he was performing the duties of a host, and his face beamed with the satisfaction which all hosts ought to feel, and with the prospect of good things to come.

And it was evident, from the appearance of the table, which had been laid for three persons, that the prospect was not a remote one.

"Make yourself at home, Jack," he said to his companion. "Our friend will soon be here, and we will have a cosy time of it. Yes, he is late—just a 'leetle' late—but then, what can you expect from a West-ender who,

like our friend, goes in for fashion, and all that sort of thing? But you will find him of the right sort. Just the man we want. But talk of the devil, and——"

The door opened, and in walked Mr. Mortimer.

Jack, who was standing before the fire, making himself at home by drying his nether garments, and so filling the small room, which the major had selected on account of its being "snug" and "quiet," with a steam which smelt of burnt wool, looked as morose as ever; but the major advanced to meet Mr. Mortimer with the most exuberant cordiality.

"Ah, my dear fellow, here you are at last! Let me introduce you to my friend Jack Marsh, than whom you will find no better card in the pack—a very ace of trumps is my friend Jack! Jack, this is Mr. Mortimer, of whom you have heard me speak so highly. It is a pleasure and a profit to know Mr. Mortimer; and I am confoundedly glad to give you an opportunity of sharing such a privilege with me. You were made to be friends, and it is honest Tom Trenton who says so."

Mr. Mortimer—*our* friend Mr. Mortimer, as well as the major's—had entered the room

somewhat timidly, but the terms in which he has been spoken of has restored his self-possession. He expresses—somewhat incoherently—his delight at having the honour to be introduced to any friend of the major's. He rolls out the word "major" as if it were something sweet and pleasant to the palate, to be kept upon the tongue as long as possible; and he swallows the last sound of it with a gulp, as if regretting he could not retain it any longer. The fact is, Mr. Mortimer, who somehow or other frequently found himself under the necessity of reminding his acquaintances that he was not "hinfallible," was not quite devoid of some of the weaknesses belonging to ordinary mortals, and amongst them, we fear, must be included the extraordinary satisfaction which he felt at being on terms of very great intimacy with a real major.

We say *real* major, for a major he undoubtedly was, in his own estimation and that of his friends; though the how, the when, and the where of his having obtained that distinguished military rank was a mystery so deep, that it is doubtful whether a careful search amongst the records at the War Office, could have solved it. It is true he

had served some three years and three-quarters in that highly-famed regiment, the Royal Roysterers; but his military career had been brought to an untimely end through the obnoxious action of a court-martial, composed of members who were jealous of his superior skill at cards—indeed, some had been great sufferers from it—and so had the audacity to ruin the prospects of a gallant officer by sentencing him to be cashiered. He must, however, notwithstanding this, have found means to get reinstated—though it was never clearly shown to what particular branch of the service he had been subsequently attached—for amongst his friends, and particularly after his fifth glass of gin and water, he was fond of alluding to his services, and more especially to the hardships he had undergone during a long tour of duty in the colonies—from his description it would seem to have been in Australia—and it was generally supposed he had received brevet rank in consequence.

In any case, Major Thomas Trenton would seem, on his return to England, to have devoted his talents, aided by the experience he had gained in the Royal Roysterers, and generally in her Majesty's Service, to a careful study, and a practical application, of those

combinations which belong to financial operations connected with the Turf. He had not, as far as anybody knew, ever served in the cavalry, but his interest in horses was very great indeed; so much so, that though he did not pretend to eloquence, he never lost an opportunity of descanting upon the necessity of our keeping up the breed of horses in this country, by encouraging and seconding, in every possible way—and of this he took a very liberal and broad view—the efforts of those who, on public or private grounds, have devoted themselves to extending, and making as general as possible, an interest in horse-racing—or as he preferred to call it, as he emphatically did—"the Turf."

In manner, there was a marked contrast between the major and the friend whom he had introduced as Jack Marsh. The major had a "make-it-pleasant-all-round" way of putting things which had obtained for him the sobriquet of old "Try-it-on;" indeed, he had cultivated blandness to such an extent that it sometimes assumed the character of benignity; the other, on the contrary, was always brusque, and frequently brutal; and if he did not interlard his cutting sentences with oaths, it was only because he possessed

a large stock of slang expressions which answered his purpose equally well; so much for manner. With respect to character, it may be said that such characters as they possessed were very nearly equal in degree, though somewhat different in kind—not sufficiently so, however, to prevent their being thoroughly congenial; and had the world been an oyster, they would probably have been found trying to open it at the same time, though possibly from different sides.

The major and Mr. Marsh were dressed somewhat in the same style, though it was evident that at this moment the major stood on the best terms with his tailor; they both gave unmistakable evidence of being devoted to potations of a more stimulating nature than toast and water; from both there came that peculiar emanation which belongs to those who indulge largely in beer, brandy, and tobacco; and upon both there remained a slight impress—faded, but still there—of a "something better" stamped upon them in their youth.

Honest Tom Trenton, as the major delighted to call himself, was, as we have said before, in his glory. He rubbed his hands

with intense satisfaction as the waiter brought in the supper.

"This is what a supper ought to be," he said. "Snug and cosy; snug and cosy. None of your saloons for Tom Trenton. Honest Tom Trenton is an old glutton; he likes to keep his friends to himself, and when he finds a good thing to share it with them—he'll be hanged if he don't!—and not blare it out to all the world."

On any other occasion, "Come, Tom, none of your cursed humbug!" would have been Mr. Marsh's rejoinder. "I know you want something. What is it? Out with your little game!" but now he was restrained by Mr. Mortimer's presence, and by his having been allowed an insight into the said "little game"—so far as it had suited the major's purpose to enlighten him—as they had walked arm-in-arm, under the same umbrella, through the streets. He did not as yet know any of the details, but what of that? He had great confidence in the major, though it is true that sometimes, when he had declared that he had six trumps in his hand, he would manage to lose the trick. But the major could keep cool, and he could not. He could not do better than put his trust in the major.

Now the major's "little game" was simply this: to pluck Mr. Marmaduke Yorke, junior, of his last feather, through the aid, in the first instance, of the unsuspecting Mr. John Mortimer.

Now Mr. John Mortimer's besetting sin was ambition. His great object was to follow in the footsteps of those whom he looked upon as his "betters." He had gained from their conversation, to which he had been an attentive listener, that the topic in which a large number of them took the greatest interest was the information in the sporting columns of the daily papers; and in a short time he cared to read nothing else. By degrees he had advanced from a few desultory bets to making a regular book; and it was in the society of a few choice spirits of similar tastes that he had come across the major.

From the very first moment the major had treated him with marked, it might, indeed, be said deferential, attention.

Never before had Mr. Mortimer been, as he conceived, rated at his proper value; and when through the major's having put him upon a thing or two, his book for the last Derby—though the bets were not large—became something to be proud of, his

gratitude knew no bounds. Indeed, he would have been a very brute had he not been grateful, for the disinterested kindness of the major had been bestowed upon him at a moment when that gallant officer was suffering under the frowns of fortune, and that to an extent which had obliged him, soon after, to withdraw for a time from the haunts of—sporting—men. Indeed, the period of his seclusion would have been considerably prolonged had it not been for the proffered and accepted aid of Mr. John Mortimer.

"My purse does not contain much," said that gentleman, "but it is all I have."

The major shook him by the hand until it ached.

"Bless you, my dear fellow—bless you!" he said. "Tom Trenton may want money—and he very often does want money—but what is a dirty hundred pounds to him in comparison with the friendship of a man who has a heart—yes, sir, a heart?"

He could say no more; his feelings were too much for him, so he carefully unfolded his pocket-handkerchief, and blew his nose with a kind of "boot-and-saddle" blast.

Mr. Marmaduke Yorke, junior—nicknamed Marmalade at school, and called, as we know,

Duke at home—had whilst at Eton betted in a small way, and made the state of the odds one of his favourite studies. During the holidays he had, with the natural frankness of a boy, often communicated his views on "coming events" to Mr. Mortimer, and that gentleman had more than once alluded to the "young gent" when in conversation with his sporting friends. The major, who was always on the look-out for opportunities, as, indeed, all great men are, pricked up his ears when he heard the name of the rich brewer's son. Hundreds of thousands of pounds floated in visions before him; and he was determined to lose no time in opening the campaign.

It was so far in his favour that Mr. Marmaduke Yorke, junior, out of respect to his father's scruples, dared not enter publicly into transactions connected with the turf; though he had already laid out a few "ponies," through the medium of Mr. Mortimer, with encouraging success. But young fish, though not so wary as old ones, are often more difficult to catch, for they have not settled down into steady habits, and you never quite know where to find them. They are fond, too, of rising at every kind of bait but the one you

want them to take, and it is especially mortifying to find them going off after your neighbour's blue fly when you had every reason to believe they preferred a red one.

But, above all, the major's scheme required time and patience. Nothing could be done until Duke had become of age, and had entered into business as a member of his father's firm. In the interval he could mature his plans, and this he had now done most thoroughly.

Mr. Mortimer was an important factor in the major's scheme, but the services of his friend Jack had become equally indispensable; for though Mr. Marmaduke Yorke, in making his books, was principally guided by Mr. Mortimer's advice, and the "tips" that gentleman was enabled to obtain for him, through the judicious employment of secret service money, the major felt that, in order to obtain the financial advantages he was hoping to derive from the operation he had in hand, it would be necessary to have the aid of some trusty and experienced coadjutor, who would act implicitly under his directions.

He rather piqued himself upon his knowledge of character, and had discovered at a very early period that the very man he

wanted was his old friend Jack, for there was something in Jack's coarse bluntness of manner which disarmed suspicion. By many he would have been looked upon as only too frank and open-hearted: the last man in the world of whom it could be possible to make a tool; but the major knew better. Just as, in Napoleonic phrase, you have but to scratch a Russian and you find a Cossack—so with Jack; the fierce swagger which seemed to betoken courage, and the frank utterances which were as the outpouring of an honest heart, served but as a cloak to hide a nature made up of qualities even more despicable than his own.

When the supper was finished, which it was in a thoroughly good style, Jack taking the lead, the major making a good second, and Mr. Mortimer well placed at the distance of a few lengths, his pace having been effected by his having made very respectable running in a previous event, the table was cleared. Brandy-and-water was introduced, and the host having lighted his cigar, and requested his friends to follow his example—which they were not slow to do—proceeded, it must be confessed in a somewhat roundabout way, to open the real business of the evening.

"Yes," he said, as if in reference to some remark made by Mr. Mortimer, though that respectable individual had not opened his mouth, except for the purpose of putting something in it, for the previous ten minutes. "Yes, Mortimer, you are quite right." Mr. Mortimer put on a conscious look which seemed to say, "I very often am, but pray don't say too much about it." "Quite right. I thoroughly agree with you. There is no use trying to do anything with the governor; but it is quite time that something should be done to induce the 'Junior' to do something more in support of the Turf."

"Certainly," echoed Mr. Mortimer. "It is quite time that something should be done."

"If he don't care for sport, he's a sneak," chimed in Jack.

"What would this country be without it?" said Mr. Mortimer.

"Sport, sir, sport," said the major, "is the pivot upon which all that is worthy of being called society—I use the word in its highest sense—revolves. Where, I would ask, without sport, would be found the courage, the pluck, the endurance, the"—a puff at his cigar—"the dash by which the British

soldier has distinguished himself on so many bloody fields, and of which I have had some small opportunity of being a humble witness. To this, no doubt, our cultivation of the noble art of self-defence and our love of field-sports have largely contributed; but, as a man of no small experience, who has had especial opportunities for gaining a practical insight into the subject, whilst serving under her Majesty's colours, and more particularly through the facilities afforded for observation during a long period of Colonial service, I would observe, that of the various pursuits which are included under the general name of 'sport,' there is none, to my mind, so beneficial in its effects as that which is carried on by those—be they noblemen or be they not" —he thumps his chest violently at the last word—"who are patrons of the Turf."

Here the major, quite out of breath through the length of his peroration, was obliged to stop and refresh himself.

Jack, who had heard much of this before, only thumped the table and emptied his glass as if in honour of a toast; whilst Mr. Mortimer, under the excitement of the major's eloquence, threw back his shoulders, protruded his chest, placed his thumbs in

the armholes of his waistcoat, in the fashion sometimes adopted by popular public speakers, and was just on the point of taking up the parable, when the major, ever jealous of interruption, laid his hand upon his arm :

"Stop, my dear friend. I would add but one word more. I think I spoke of the Turf. A more glorious institution never existed. What man is there whose patriotism is so dead that he would wish to see it destroyed ? No matter from what point of view it may be regarded, its beneficial influences are undeniable. Where, I should like to ask, can be found a better school for our inexperienced youth ? for does it not teach more thoroughly than any other, the principles upon which all honourable intercourse ought to be regulated ? Good faith, confidence, forbearance, and a thousand other virtues upon which I need not dwell. For, is it not enough to know that what I have thus humbly asserted is daily borne testimony to by the great leaders and directors of public opinion in this country. I refer, sir, to the Press; for how many columns do we not find—read, perhaps, by all who have any pretension to true manly feeling, with greater attention than any other —dedicated to the most minute and interest-

ing details connected with the heart-stirring incidents belonging to the Turf?"

Here another pause, another demonstration of approval from Jack, another series of elocutionary preparations from Mr. Mortimer, again ruthlessly suppressed by the major, who, under the inspiration of his third glass, continued as follows:

"But, gentlemen, it is not from purely moral or sentimental points of view that the question of the Turf has to be regarded. Tom Trenton, as all the world knows, is a practical man; and as a practical man it is that he now tells you, that the material benefits of the Turf far outweigh all others. Look, gentlemen—I don't ask you to take Tom Trenton's word for it; just use your own eyes, and look at our horses. I say *our* horses, and I say so advisedly, for I feel with honest pride—and Tom Trenton has his pride—that every man who throws his leg over a saddle, whether in the hunting-field or in the Park, is indebted for all the perfections belonging to the animal he bestrides—is a debtor, I say, to those humble individuals who, like some I could name, did not modesty forbid, have done all they can to encourage the breed of horses in this country by most

strenuous, unceasing, and untiring efforts to further the interests of all that concerns the Turf. The Jockey Club, gentlemen, may be worthy of our respect; Tattersall's may have its advantages and its merits; but it is to the unpretending and ceaseless labours of independent individuals—I repeat it fearlessly, independent individuals, whose voices are to be heard on every racecourse in the three kingdoms, that the greatest credit is due. It would be false modesty, gentlemen, were we to shut our eyes to our own merits. Gentlemen, I drink to our noble selves, and with the toast I associate the name of that true lover and patron of sport, my valued friend Mr. John Mortimer."

Mr. Mortimer, who is a thorough believer in the major, a thorough believer in Jack, and a thorough believer in himself, rises to respond, with as much gravity and dignity as if he had been assisting at a city feast, and had been called upon to return thanks for the House of Lords by Mr. Harker.

"You treat me with an honour I do not deserve," he said, bowing to the major, "but I will not deny that I love sport, and that for some years I have done my best to give it such support as has been in my power.

Circumstances, to which I need not now refer, have prevented me from hentering into the hamusements belonging to country life, so far as hunting or shooting is concerned; though during that part of the year in which the duties of my hoffice compel me to reside away from this great city, I think I may say, few gentlemen have had better opportunities of becoming acquainted with everything which concerns those sports than I have, for we talk of nothing else from morning to night: 'Tis nothing but foxes here and foxes there; and pheasants in this place and pheasants in that, till sometimes I feel all of a daze, and get no sound sleep at night from a-dreaming of foxes a-running after pheasants, and dogs a-barking and chasing the foxes, and men on horses a-halloing and galloping after the dogs. It makes my brain all of a whirl, that it does. But when I come to the Turf, gentlemen, then I feel at home. All that the major says in that direction is as true as the sun; there is, however, one little remark I should like to make. In an old country like ours, there are natural divisions between man and man, as everyone who thinks at all must see and feel. 'Twas ever so, and so 'twill ever be; but as the poet

says," continued Mr. Mortimer, as he liberated his thumbs and pulled down his waistcoat with an emphatic jerk, "on the racecourse I feel—you know the lines—'my name is Macgregor, my foot's on the heather'—the equal of the Duke—of—no matter what, for are we not a-standing on the same turf, a-doing of the same thing? And was it not at the last Hepsom races that, as I brushed up against him, and touched my hat, his grace called out, 'Halloa, Mortimer, is that you? what the devil do you mean by treading on my corns?' By Jove! gentlemen, it made me feel that I was a man. And if I were to show some of the names a-written in my book, for the next event, a few people that I know of would open their eyes a little wider when they met a certain John Mortimer than they do now."

"Bosh!" ejaculated the gentleman called Jack. "It's all a case of odds. I'll be hanged if I care where the money comes from, and those confounded puppies with their long purses and perfumed pocket-handkerchiefs, are not the weight of a curse more particular. But what I hate, is, that they are nowadays so infernal knowing, that honest fellows—like our friend the major here—stand but a poor

chance. The times are changed—as I have found out to my cost."

"My dear Jack," said the major, "you know my motto, 'Nil desperandum'—never despair. We should not allow ourselves to lose sight of such noble examples as the past history of the Turf affords. Look, for instance, at the case of Cuffwell, who from small beginnings became a man of large fortune and an M.P. Mark that, Mortimer—an M.P., all through his having employed his abilities in what is undoubtedly the best of fields for any man who has more brains than his neighbours, and would coin money out of them."

"For any man who is not cursed with ill-luck," grumbled Jack.

"My dear Jack, why will you be so desponding?" said the major, in his blandest tones. "There is no lane without a turning; and who knows what fortune may not have in store for you, and not only for you, but for me—for the jade has used me somewhat scurvily of late—and for our friend Mortimer more especially, for whom, if he will only go on as he has begun, and not allow himself to be discouraged by occasional checks, I venture to predict a brilliant future. But, my dear friends, we must not be always thinking of

ourselves; we must take the interests of others sometimes into our keeping. Let me see—yes, we were talking of the Junior; we really must see if we cannot do something for him. Mortimer, you should really take him in hand—by the way, I think you told us he was of age, and in the firm."

"Yes," said Mr. Mortimer, assuming an air of importance, "the double event was celebrated just nine weeks ago come next Wednesday. I ought to know something about it, for I was a participator in the festivities."

"In that case," said the major, "I think Tom Trenton can see his way—or, to speak more correctly, *our* way towards lending him a helping hand. And I know no reason why—for we have it from the best authority that the labourer is worthy of his hire—whilst furthering the great objects, which are the aim of that admirable institution to which we are all so devoted, the Turf, and benefiting a worthy young member of society, we should not at the same time derive certain legitimate and substantial advantages, the nature of which it is not necessary for me to go into."

Mr. Mortimer pricked up his ears; but Jack only looked fiercely mournful. His confidence

in the major was great, but continued ill-luck had made him desponding.

The major ceased speaking, and puffed complacently at his cigar. He had a sanguine temperament, and was not slow at building castles in the air.

"But will it not be difficult?" mildly suggested Mr. Mortimer.

"I should like to know how it is to be done," said Jack.

"My dear boys," said the major, "leave it to me; there's nothing easier in the world. Mortimer, my man, you shall help me make his next book; and you, my dear Jack, shall sell him a horse."

"I!" shouted Jack. "I sell him a horse?"

"Yes, my dear Jack, there is nothing easier. It is all arranged: you shall sell him a horse; and on that blessed animal's back we will all ride to Fortune."

"To the devil!" growled Jack.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE COUNTRY.

THE Yorkes have been spending the summer in the country. This year—no one seems to know exactly why—there has been no yachting, and the *Nautilus,* as if weary of winning cups, reposes in ignominious ease upon the muddy couch of Haslar Creek.

There has been no trip to the Continent; for Duke has suddenly voted travelling "a bore," and expressed a wish to pass the summer months at home. He must have found that "a bore" too, judging from the anxious weary expression which of late has been creeping over his drawn and pallid cheeks, and the frequent necessity he has been under of making short trips for change of air: generally to one of those parts of the three kingdoms upon which, for the time, the

whole attention of "the sporting world" is concentrated.

Lady Arabella has become anxious. She is afraid he is ill, and talks about the Riviera, or Davos, for the winter.

Mr. Yorke does not share her anxiety; his attention has been taken up with other matters. Lady Arabella thinks it odd, and openly expresses her conviction that her husband takes more interest in that "disgusting wish" of Victoria Marsh to become a doctor, than he does in the interests of his own children.

"Look at poor Duke!" she said. "It does not require a mother's eye to see that he has fallen into a very serious state of health; and yet his father seems to think nothing of it—whilst he frets and fumes because this comparative stranger, a girl whom we have only known a few years, does not act exactly as he likes. He could not make more fuss about her if she were his own daughter. Ah, mon Dieu—mon Dieu!"

Poor Lady Arabella! She would not have said "Mon Dieu—mon Dieu!" in English, for the world.

It is true that when Mr. Yorke had heard, at first by accident, of Victoria's intention, he

had sent for Dr. Pringle, and pointed out how objectionable, from every point of view, such a course of action appeared to him. He was greatly astonished, and not a little annoyed, to find that the doctor held very different opinions on the subject.

"I am sorry to find that you approve of her conduct, my dear sir—very sorry! It is a subject upon which I ought, perhaps, not to have spoken. But I look upon Victoria as one of your family; and as one of a family thrown together so intimately as yours has been with mine, it is only natural I should take an interest in her welfare, and feel pained at what I still look upon as a singularly injudicious proceeding on her part."

"Although we differ so strongly, I appreciate very highly the motives which have induced you to use your friendly influence in this matter," said the doctor.

"It will be most injurious to her prospects," said Mr. Yorke. "Victoria is a very clever and attractive girl, and ought to make a good marriage."

"She will never marry," said the doctor, with decision.

"My dear doctor!" said Mr. Yorke, "you speak as if you were the oracle of Fate. Per-

haps she says so now. But pray tell me, did you ever in the course of your experience meet with a woman who never changed her mind?"

The doctor smiled.

"I know something of character," he said; "and firmness in Victoria almost amounts to obstinacy. She will never change it."

"But what could have induced her to have come to this decision?" asked Mr. Yorke.

"You are a man of honour, Mr. Yorke," said the doctor, "and will, I know, keep inviolate any communication I may make to you. To such a question from any other man I should remain silent; but the friendly feeling you have shown towards Victoria makes me reluctant that you should misinterpret her motives. It may be, however, you would prefer that I remained silent."

"Pray go on," said Mr. Yorke.

"You are of course not aware that Victoria Marsh is illegitimate?" said the doctor. At this moment Mr. Yorke leant back in his chair and shaded his eyes with his hand—the light was evidently too strong for him. "This fact was lately revealed to her, together with some very painful incidents connected with her family history—the details of

some of which I do not myself know, in a letter which, in accordance with a promise made to her aunt when she was dying, I handed to her on her last birthday. To a sensitive and proud nature—for Victoria, though utterly without vanity, is not devoid of pride—such a revelation would be very likely to lead to a determination never to marry; but I am inclined to think, though I have not read the letter, that it contained a direct request to that effect. Victoria had a deep affection for her aunt; and words which are spoken to us from the verge of the grave by those we love cease to be counsels—they become commands."

Mr. Yorke was silent for a few seconds.

"Poor girl!" he said at length; "it is a sad story. The old, old tale." His voice trembled as he spoke. "But you are quite right, this should be kept secret. A strange world this!"

"In which the innocent often have to bear the burdens imposed upon them by the guilty," said the doctor.

"Had Mrs. Marsh, then, think you, no knowledge of her niece's parentage—of Victoria's—father?"

"I know not—she too had much pride,

and I should hardly think would be likely to allow her mind to dwell upon—or care for Victoria to have any knowledge of—a man she had so much reason to despise."

The light is evidently too strong for Mr. Yorke's eyes, for again he has to shade them with his hands.

"Ah, it is all those cursed cigars!" said the doctor to himself, as he saw how those hands trembled.

"I think she has an independent fortune," at length said Mr. Yorke.

"Her aunt left everything to her, and it is more than sufficient for her needs. It is not from necessity that Victoria prefers work to idleness."

"Then you think she has quite made up her mind, doctor?"

"I am quite sure."

"It would be no use then, for me or Lady Arabella to speak to her on the subject?"

"Not the slightest; and it would only be painful to all parties."

"And she is to go to Zurich?"

"Yes; at the end of the month it has been decided on as the best place for her to commence her studies in."

"Why not London?"

"At every step she would have to overcome a prejudice."

"Well, well! I suppose there is no more to be said; what cannot be cured must be endured."

Giving utterance to this wise adage, Mr. Yorke rose from his chair.

"Dear me," thought the doctor, as he did so, "what can be the matter with the man? How ill he looks!"

Within a few days of this conversation, a note was received at Deepdale from Lady Arabella:

"My dear Mrs. Pringle," she said in it, "we are moped to death; the dulness of the summer months we have passed at Nettlestone is beyond expression, and has told upon us all. Will you, good, kind creature that you are, do an act of great kindness by letting your charming daughter and our clever friend Miss Marsh come to us for a few days? I cannot tell you how pleased my dear children will be if you accede to this request; and, as Marmaduke is now at home, if your good son will accompany them, Mr. Yorke and myself will be very glad to see him."

"What does Mrs. Pringle say?" asked Mr.

Yorke, as the footman handed Lady Arabella the answer.

It was at his instigation that the note had been written, in spite of some resistance on her part; but she had given in gracefully at last, for she knew that with Mr. Yorke opposition beyond a certain point was hopeless.

"I am sorry to say they are coming."

"Umph!" said Mr. Yorke.

Lady Arabella never liked to hear that "Umph!"

CHAPTER XV.

MID AUTUMN LEAVES.

NETTLESTONE COURT was a spacious substantial-looking building of cut stone, with a solid portico utterly devoid of originality, yet belonging to no known style, under which you drove with a certain sense of apprehension, for it is quite possible to pile up blocks of stone in such a way that all the pillars in the world cannot dispel the idea that the whole mass may at any moment topple down upon your head and crush you.

Nettlestone Court stood in a park of some eight hundred acres, so carefully laid out that the drive from the lodge-gates gave a very exaggerated idea of its extent. Before Mr. Yorke's time, the park had been much smaller, and the distance from the high-road had been comparatively short; but an addition of five hundred acres had been made to it; the

old lodge pulled down, and two new ones erected at the opposite extremities of the demesne. Lady Arabella had then taken the matter in hand, and by means of much planting, embanking, and curving, had succeeded in producing an effect full of the most agreeable surprises to all but those to whom time and distance were an object.

"Very good indeed," was the verdict of Dr. Pringle when called upon to admire it; "but your ladyship has managed matters so skilfully that I have to drive over two miles now, where before it was but one."

"How dreadfully matter of fact!" said Lady Arabella.

"Remember, that to some people time is money," said the doctor.

"Then, my dear doctor, you must raise your fees!"

"No, no!" said the doctor, laughing, "that would never do. I should lose some of my best patients. I have lived too long in the world not to know how few people there are in it who do not resent being called upon to put their hands in their pockets."

"Yes," said Lady Arabella, "it is melancholy to see how fond most people are of money. I am sure I hate it! If I could

have my own way, I would have nothing but diamonds."

But this conversation had taken place some years before. At the time of which we are writing, the approaches to Nettlestone had greatly increased in beauty, for the shrubs were full of luxuriant growth, and the young saplings had shot up into trees of respectable size, whilst a few older trees, the remaining representatives of the forest which had once spread over this part of the county, towered, in all the majesty of hoary age, above them. It seemed almost as if their gnarled and knotted arms were spread abroad to mock the puny strength of their companions; and, as the autumnal breezes soughed through their lofty branches, it was as if one heard voices, now lifted up in hymns of praise, now sinking into murmurs, which fell upon the ear like an earnest, whispered prayer.

On a fine autumnal afternoon, some few months after Dr. Pringle's visit to St. Tobias's, three persons might have been seen walking slowly towards one of these trees, round the stem of which a seat had been encircled. In the tall, lithe, firm-treading girl, whose every movement gave evidence of strength of body, as of will; in the slighter, drooping figure

by her side, stepping timidly, as if to feel her way—it was impossible not to recognise the two daughters of the house, Geraldine and Eva. The third was Duke, but he seemed to have grown prematurely old, for he walked with his head bent, and eyes fixed on the ground, and had that tired, languid air which belongs to the weariness of age.

They were walking down the avenue from the house; and it was evident they were expecting some one, for they looked frequently in the direction of the lodge, of which the battlemented roof could be seen in the distance.

As they sat down, the conversation was renewed at the point where it had just before been broken off, by Geraldine:

"I cannot imagine what it was made papa alter his mind. You know, in the spring, he was full of it."

"Well, if you must know, Lal,"—Lal and Pen were the names by which Duke called his sisters when he was in a good humour—it is I to whom the honour is due of having converted our most respectable parent. I do not want to leave England just now, or even to cruise along its shores. I have other fish to fry."

"I am so glad of it," said Eva. "I hate yachting."

"You provoking child!" said Geraldine. "I am so sorry, for I love it. The dear old *Nautilus!* I cannot bear to think of her being laid up, during all this lovely weather, upon that horrid mud. Dear old thing! what happy days we have had in her! Do you remember our trip to Guernsey?"

"Pray don't mention it! I was never so ill in my life," said Eva.

"And so lost the best fun I ever saw in my life," said Duke, "when the baronet jumped overboard to save an imaginary somebody, and was within an ace of being drowned. I shall never forget Lal's face; it nearly killed me with laughing."

"Duke," said Geraldine, indignantly, "it always seems to me that you laugh at the wrong time. I really believe you have no heart."

"Then we are both much alike," he retorted; "for yours, I know, has been the baronet's from that hour."

Geraldine was about to answer, but for the moment her anger prevented her; and before she could speak, Eva had interposed. Eva was always the peace-maker.

"It is only his foolish fun. You know he does not mean what he says—do you, Duke?"

"It is—is cowardly!" said Geraldine, gasping out the words. "It is too cruel; but what can you expect from Duke? He has no feeling for anyone! He loves nothing but money! He is only fit to be a brewer!"

"Hush, hush!" said Eva; "please don't talk like that."

"Fiddlestick!" said Duke. "My dear Pen, let her talk. I like to hear her. Of course, we poor brewers are hateful to her since the baronet's grand temperance speech. But where would we all be, I should like to know, if it were not for beer? And as to love of money, pray tell me, my most virtuously indignant sister, whether it is more criminal to love money than to spend it? Why, if it were not for this vulgar beer, and the contemptible money beer brings, how would some young ladies of my acquaintance be able to pay for the fifty thousand little fads with which they indulge their fancies? But this is always the way with you women; you spend the money that we men make without scruple, and then abuse us for making it. You would like money to rain down

from heaven in golden showers! But what is the meaning of this?" he said, breaking off suddenly and looking towards the trunk of the tree under which they sat. "Another E, and freshly cut, for I could swear it was not there a week ago. Eva, I don't like these E's! I saw one the other day on the Deepdale beech."

"There are plenty of people in the world whose names begin with E," said Eva, becoming in her turn very red.

"Very true, Pen; but when that unlicked cub Chub, whose handiwork I more than suspect in this, goes about the country cutting E's on everything bigger than a stick, it does not require a man to be a Senior Wrangler to supply two other letters. He had better look out."

"Duke, Duke!" said Eva, imploringly.

"Oh, do not be alarmed, dear; Chub is quite capable of taking care of himself, although he is not a rich brewer," said Geraldine.

"Is he?" said Duke. "Then I should advise him to do so. And I would request my sapient sister to remember that he is no longer a little boy."

"And that Sis is no longer a little girl," said Geraldine.

Duke made no answer, for he was busily employed at that moment re-lighting his cigar. Before he had finished doing so, the sound of wheels was heard, and Dr. Pringle's waggonette was seen driving up the avenue.

"Come, girls, a truce to this nonsense," cried Duke. "I cannot afford to quarrel; it annoys me, and I have quite enough to annoy me as it is. It is enough to make a fellow out of sorts. I did not tell you, Lal, but Fortuna has had a sprain. I had a letter this morning from Jack Marsh."

"I wonder if he can be any relation to Vic," said Eva.

"What nonsense! I should hope not, from all I have heard of him," said Geraldine. Then, turning to her brother: "I am glad you had some reason for your horrible ill-temper; but this is serious. You had better have followed my advice. I knew you would be taken in."

"You be hanged!" said Duke; "it is not too late. I have written to the major. I shall hedge."

From this it will be seen that Mr. Marmaduke Yorke had become the owner of "a

horse," and that his sisters were in his confidence; Geraldine somewhat sympathising with him, and Eva having but a very cloudy perception of what it meant. Of course, it was a secret. It would not do for a member of the firm of Souseman and Soppit to keep race-horses and enter into transactions on the Turf. So it was as the property of Mr. Marsh—the Jack being in this case omitted — that Fortuna stood before the world; and Mr. Marsh's brown filly Fortuna had already excited some interest in the sporting world by having taken a good place in one or two minor events; and amongst the knowing ones—this on the authority of the major—there was a very decided opinion that she was the "coming" horse.

The major had not taken any part in the purchase of the horse. Of course not. He had but stood behind the scenes and pulled the strings, much to the satisfaction of all the world and to his own profit.

Meanwhile, the Deepdale waggonette has drawn up before the tree. Chub hands the reins to the groom, and jumps down with a thud, for a heavy fellow is Chub. Duke opens the door and hands down Victoria and Sis, who are inside. The girls kiss. The

young men shake hands. The groom is ordered to drive on to the Court, and leave the shawls, etc. And the party move slowly together in the direction of the house.

"It is so very kind of you all to come," said Geraldine. "Particularly when we are so dull, and have no one with us."

"I am so glad I am at home," said Duke aside to Sis.

"But a week is too short," said Eva. "When the time comes, we will not let you go."

Whom was she most thinking of? Could it have been that great, good-natured, heavy, hearty-looking fellow Chub?

Sis looked more radiant, more loveable than ever. There was no withstanding her. There was only one word which would describe her exactly, and her friends had hit upon that word, when they said she always looked so "sweet." So sweet indeed that no one could see Sis without wishing to kiss her. Her lady friends—no matter, young or old—kissed her at meeting, and kissed her at parting; whilst little children clambered up and kissed her again and again with their rosy lips.

Sweet Sis! charming, and conscious of her charms: full of gay prattle and gleesome

quips. Sis trips lightly on the sward which bounds the road, Duke—forgetting for the time Fortuna and all his woes—ever at her side.

They had started in a group. But when young people walk together they are sure ere long to be found in pairs; and so Sis and Duke, Eva and Chub—both looking in their way supremely happy—Victoria and Geraldine, move slowly forwards, not by the avenue, but by shady circuitous paths through the shrubberies and grounds, on their way to the house.

Cupid must have been in a malicious mood when he had transfixed the hearts of two such very opposite young people as Eva and Chub with the same shaft. How they could have fallen so deeply in love with each other as they were, is utterly incomprehensible; indeed, it would be incredible, were not things equally strange happening every day around us.

There was Eva; gentle, sensitive Eva! frail of form, and given to melancholy thoughts, with many ideas, and few opinions, setting her affections upon, of all people in the world, that great, hulking, unimaginative, open-hearted fellow Chub: Chub, with his

few ideas and many opinions. Why, physically and mentally, they were as different as light from darkness. Yet they were over head and ears in love with each other none the less; and at this very moment Chub had reached that happy, or unhappy, frame of mind, which belongs to lovers, when it would have been a joy to him if he could have thrown himself down before Eva and kissed the ground on which she stood.

Most strange, that this cheery, matter-of-fact, unpoetical, big youth must needs set all the affections belonging to his honest heart on the fragile, delicate, sad-thinking Penserosa; and in his solitary moments could find no other solace or means of soothing his emotions than, to use his own words, "pulling" at a huge pipe, which he had been endeavouring—fruitlessly—for many months to blacken, whilst he thought of her.

But what, perhaps, had first attracted Chub to Eva, was that she was the only person who listened to him, who did not contradict him, and who even went to the extent of asking his advice. Now, to young or old, there is no greater charm than being appreciated; and Eva's appreciation was to Chub an irresistible spell. Everybody else, to use a

very expressive phrase, "sat upon him." Sis made him fetch and carry like a dog; Victoria always spoke as if she were instructing him; his father had got into a disagreeable way of speaking of and to him as if he were an object for compassion, and nothing annoyed him more than to hear himself spoken of as "poor" Chub. His mother seemed to think he could only be made happy by being treated as frequently as possible to some favourite dish; Sir Francis was horribly civil to him; Geraldine appeared hardly to be aware of his presence; and Duke assumed patronising airs towards him, until his blood boiled with indignation. Is it to be wondered then that he was ready, as we have said before, to fall down and worship the very ground upon which Eva stood.

There had been a time when Chub was a great talker, but he had become silent and reserved of late. Eva and Chub seemed also to have found out the secret, that when love is deepest it has fewest words; for, as they walked along side by side, the only sound was the crush of the fallen leaves under the heavy tramp of Chub's great feet. Yes, they were silent; but so happy!

At some little distance—the windings of

the path often hid the couples from each other —came Victoria and Geraldine.

For some time, by an almost imperceptible process, an estrangement had sprung up between them—an estrangement which had puzzled Victoria, and the cause for which Geraldine would not willingly have confessed even to herself.

This was the first time they had been thrown together since Victoria's return from London, and there was a constraint in the manner of the two girls which made it awkward for both.

As they walked along the path, side by side, the resemblance between them was very striking. They were nearly of the same height; their figures seemed as if moulded in the same form; they both walked very erect, and there was something in the bearing of each which spoke of self-confidence and strength of will. They had, too, the same regular features, the same frank fearlessness in the expression of the eyes; but there the resemblance ended, and no one could have observed them more closely without a feeling of surprise at having thought them so alike—they became so different.

The beauty of Geraldine was in her exquisite complexion, her transparent skin, her golden hair, her fascinating smile, her ruddy

lips closing over a row of teeth of unrivalled whiteness. She charmed no less by her vivacity, her unaffected grace; by the unstudied piquancy of all she said and did, than by her beauty. She only ceased to charm when she ceased to be herself, and affected a style and manner that did not belong to her.

Victoria's complexion was not good; her dark hair, through its luxuriance, fell in too heavy tresses; there was a want of elasticity about her movements; something of hardness about her mouth; and her teeth, though regular and white, were too solid and firmly set. It was only when you spoke with her and came to know her that all her beauty was revealed; for when she looked straight up into the eyes of those to whom she spoke, out of her own large, lustrous, truthful, trusting eyes—those marvellous "windows of the soul"—she seemed as if she were speaking with thoughts and not with words, and as if candour, purity, and love had joined to form each phrase; and she became truly beautiful.

Yet the expression of those eyes could change. Duke knew it to his cost. For once or twice, when he had been speaking lightly on subjects which Victoria considered should be inviolate, he had seen them turned upon him

full of contempt and scorn. And he had quailed under that glance.

"It is all very well," he said one day to Sis, "for you to tell me that Vic is this, or Vic is that; she may be a very angel, but there is a devil lurking in those eyes of hers, which I for one don't like."

Perhaps it was the fear of arousing this devil that made Duke more careful in Victoria's presence, than he was either when with his sisters or alone with Sis. It was singular, but there were times when from the bright blue eyes of Geraldine there streamed forth the same expression of scornful indignation—only different, from its being perhaps less intense. The resemblance between the two girls at such times was even greater than usual, and it was probably from this cause that Duke, who always affected to be amused when his sisters were displeased, used to jeer at her and request, if she set any value on her beauty, she would not look so fierce and give herself these "Victorian" airs.

This likeness between Geraldine and Victoria had not been lost on Mr. Mortimer—whose language, by the way, had assumed a very sporting character since his connection with the Turf. "A good spanking pair" was

his remark ; "a little out in colour, but bright bay and dark brown don't make a bad match. Take 'em all round, I don't think you would see anything finer—and sound as a bell. But I doubt if it would be easy to break 'em to double harness—our young un would be always jumping over the traces—and Miss Vic would get the bit between her teeth. A man would have to sit tight."

"So you have really decided on being a doctor!" said Geraldine, at length, to Victoria.

"I would say rather, on trying to be a doctor."

"What courage you must have! But have you not to go through a great deal of nasty work?"

"In a certain sense, undoubtedly ; but not more than I have gone through as a nurse. And then the aim is higher—and no work can be called nasty when it becomes interesting, as the means to a great end."

"And will you really have to cut up horrid dead bodies, and all that sort of thing?"

"I shall have to study anatomy in the usual manner; and I am determined not to give way to any feelings which would interfere with my becoming a more useful member of society than I can hope to be at present."

"But are we women strong enough for such work?"

"Women—who are born into this world with an average amount of health—are either weak or strong, as they have been *made* weak or strong. Look at the poor, and see how the women work."

"Yes," said Geraldine, laughing, "and at the rich, and see how some girls can play. Why, I must confess to having sometimes danced all night without being tired, and taken my share of lawn-tennis the next day without turning a hair. But our nerves—our brains, are they strong enough?"

"It has always seemed to me that women are never at a loss for nerve when they want it; or how do you account for their having been found on the tops of the highest mountains—on the backs of unbroken horses—full of delight in gales of wind at sea? No! nerves, like muscles, must be exercised, or they become weak; and so with the brain."

"But I have heard that our brains are smaller than a man's," said Geraldine.

"If it be so, what matter! All men have not large brains; and if we cannot hope to rival extraordinary men, we may at least compete with ordinary ones. Besides, there is

such a thing as quality as well as quantity; and whenever the brain of some great philosopher or acknowledged genius is found to be smaller than it ought to be, it is always declared to make up for its deficiency in size or weight by its superior quality—it is more convolute—more something. Let us hope that that is also the case with ours."

"Do you then really think that we women are equal in physical and mental strength to men?"

"Undoubtedly. Not in kind, however, but in degree. Physically, a woman possesses a greater amount of "stored-up strength" than a man. Mentally, her quicker perception makes up for his greater inductive power. But, of course, I am speaking of woman, not as she is, but as she would be if properly brought up —properly educated."

"You must think me very frivolous," said Geraldine.

Victoria paused for a moment.

"I think," she said slowly, as she turned her truthful eyes full upon her, "that if you only did yourself justice, you would be as lovable as Eva; and you know how I love her."

"Yes—the strong always love the weak—

it is because she is so weak. Why do you love her more than Sis?"

"Because she has a heart," said Victoria.

There was another pause; then abruptly:

"Victoria—what if you should marry?"

What was it that made Victoria stop—almost stagger; that made her lips turn pale? It was but for a moment; then she moved on as calmly as before, and it would have been difficult to have detected any emotion in her voice, as she replied:

"No, I shall never marry."

"Ah, you think so now—but who knows! you may alter your mind."

"Never, never," said Victoria, sternly, and her eyes were full of wrath; "when I say a thing I mean it. Am I so untrue? No, no; there is a fate for each of us. Yours, I know not; but mine is to be Victoria Marsh to the end."

The passion in her voice had gradually subsided as she spoke, and there was something almost plaintive in the accent of the last words. They seemed to go straight to Geraldine's heart, and, moved by an impulse she would have found it difficult to explain, she threw her arms round Victoria's neck, and kissed her on each cheek.

"Victoria," she said, "till this moment I have misunderstood you. Do not despise me because I am such a heartless, worldly fool; help me to conquer this poor miserable self: from this be my friend—be my sister."

And so it was that Geraldine Yorke and Victoria Marsh became fast friends. Duke and Sis thought they loved each other; Eva and Chub were unquestionably deeply in love with each other; but the most unchanging, most enduring love—most enduring because it was based upon a greater love cherished by both within the secret recesses of their hearts —was the love which had been established between Geraldine and Victoria, as they had walked, side by side, in all the gushing confidence of youth, through that bough-enshadowed path, 'mid the autumn leaves.

CHAPTER XVI.

WORKING FOR THE WORLD.

Sir Francis Hawthorne had also, with a few occasional short absences, spent his summer in the country. He had renewed his intimacy with his old friend the doctor and his family, but his visits were less frequent; and he was now so seldom at the Court, that Lady Arabella had spoken of him for some time as "ce cher misanthrope." Another mistake on Lady Arabella's part, for no man could justly be called a misanthrope who had determined, with a certain example ever before his eyes, to devote his every effort to the benefit of others.

"Ah, my good friend," said Dr. Pringle one day, shaking his finger warningly at him, "mind what you are about! If you don't take care you will find yourself enrolled

amongst the Philanthropists before you know where you are, and mixed up with them in all sorts of impracticable schemes for doing good. Take an old man's advice, work with whatever individual powers you may possess, but avoid combinations. When men combine and act together, one well-meaning fool may mar all. Social questions are as difficult to manage as four young thoroughbreds, and who would wish to place the ribbons in more than one pair of hands? No! whenever you can, always do the work yourself."

"And so let all the blame of failure fall on my own shoulders, eh, doctor?"

"Failure, my dear sir," said the doctor, "is only feared by fools; all success is built up out of failures, and I would not give a fig for the man who boasts that he always succeeds."

"But failure is very disheartening."

"Not a whit," said the doctor; "it should be a whet to exertion. How do you sharpen that scythe? certainly not by cutting something soft with it, but by knocking sparks of fire out of it with a rough stone."

The fact is, Sir Francis, with all his schemes for the good of others, was often driven to

the very verge of despair. He had not taken into account that men and women are in most cases the mere children of circumstances, and that the habits and prejudices which those circumstances have created are often so deep-rooted that they can never be eradicated; he had overlooked the fact that progress can never be dragged on with post-horses, and that the man who does most in his generation—for himself as well as for others—is he who best knows how to work and wait. He must do both.

Now Sir Francis liked to work, but he hated the waiting. So he was often disappointed and out of heart.

"He means well—he means well, neighbour," said Goody Giles, "that he do; but drat it! why don't he leave things be?"

"Aye, aye! we moves too fast—too fast! 'Twan't for the wage, I'd rather work for ould Hicks."

"Ah, Hicks do give beer in harvest."

Then the new houses on his estate did not give satisfaction. They were not so "snug loike." "In the old un's, all us wanted seemed so to come to hand. Now, one must scrub, and scrub from morn to night, and if they

don't a-shine out loike new pins, well, there's a row."

The farmers, too, were not satisfied.

"It is all very well to talk about low rents, but how about these new-fangled schools? Time was when we got boys to do men's work for next to nothing; now they are not to be had for love or money. They must be at school, forsooth! and precious little use will be all they learn there. Don't tell me, sir! give me the good old times. People did a good day's work then, and it was a sight to see them going home when it was done, a regularly tired out; the women and boys, as well as men. And as to drink! Lord, sir, if them men did take a drop more than they ought when the Saturday night came, it kept them contented. In those days there was no Arches; they never passed an employer without touching their hats. And the farmers—well, perhaps I oughtn't to say it—but if their men fell sick, and their families were in want, well, we put our hands in our pockets and helped 'em as much as we could; and there is always the Union in the end."

But he who was most discontented of all

with Sir Francis's doings was the Reverend St. John Softridge, the clergyman of the united parishes of Slocum-cum-Magnus, in which both the Court and Hawthornedene stood; Deepdale was just over the border. That gentleman lamented in touching tones, through his wife, for she generally acted as spokesman for her husband, and indeed was by many regarded as the real incumbent of the parish, to whom the Rev. St. John acted as a kind of curate—not in charge—the sad spirit of independence which had been engendered amongst the poor by Sir Francis's indiscreet action.

"It is indeed sad," she said, "to see it; and it has affected my husband very much. A parish priest cannot have any influence amongst his people when they have been taught they are capable of thinking for themselves; and pray what have all these high wages led to? To nothing but a feeling that they can do without help; and that all interference with their affairs is an impertinence. You know how Mr. Softridge used to visit amongst the people; and the misery we used to find amongst them; and the quantity of soup and old clothes we were able to distri-

bute is something incredible. I am sure it used to make my arms ache. Now, what a change! A young chit of a child will bring out its savings' bank-book, and the mother will ask you to sit down and take a cup of tea with all the airs of an equal. No one can have better intentions than Sir Francis, but these democrats unfortunately do so much harm with their wild ideas; I only wish he was more like Mr. Yorke. My husband always says, with a few more men like him, we might hope to see the Church put in its right place. And then we should not have this dissenting chapel built on the very borders of the parish, and no less than four of Sir Francis's servants Baptists or 'Brethren,' or whatever they choose to call themselves."

One might have thought that if this were the state of feeling produced in the Rev. St. John Softridge by Sir Francis's well-intentioned efforts, that the Rev. Jonas Smallpage, the Independent minister, who had lately taken charge of the circuit in which the unsightly chapel, built upon ground given by Sir Francis, was situated, would have been better satisfied. Not one whit. The Rev.

Jonas was always lamenting that for a man of his views Sir Francis "wanted breadth."

"Look you," he would say, "look you, in these days, when men's ideas have to be thrown into the crucible and purified as it were by fire; when—I speak as a man—the spirit of inquiry is abroad, and turns upon the world, even as it were from a lantern, its bright and searching rays, so that the darkest regions are illumined, and the secrets hidden within the deepest recesses of the human heart are revealed, we must let our light so shine before men that there may be no going astray, no following after false lights; our notes of warning must be rung out clear and sharp. The bell fixed on the shoal must give no uncertain sound. Sir Francis wants breadth; he wants thoroughness. Look you! if 'twere not so, would he speak of temperance whilst his cellar is yet full of wine? Would he preach tolerance, and speak, as I have heard him speak, to my sorrow, my deep sorrow, of the benefits conferred in olden times upon the world by that harlot who still sits, until her time comes, and it is coming, upon her seven hills? And who, no later than last week, said, before our worthy

friend the deacon, that as matters now stood, and in face of all the benefits which had been conferred upon the community by the Church of England, he could not make up his mind that the time had arrived for its disestablishment. Fancy that, gentlemen, fancy that! A man who professes advanced opinions, and calls himself a Liberal, not able to make up his mind on the one great question, certainly the greatest crucial question, of the day. No, my friends, it is to be deeply lamented, but it is so—Sir Francis is too narrow; he wants breadth."

No wonder that there were times when Sir Francis felt disheartened. He would have been entirely so but for the example of Victoria.

Whilst on his travels, he had kept up a correspondence with Dr. Pringle, and had learnt from him how courageously and steadily she had been working.

"What pleases me most," had said the doctor, on one occasion, "is that she works hard without overworking herself. She never loses her balance, and keeps her mind occupied with wholesome thoughts, instead of giving way to useless regrets, and to the

morbid fascination which belong to melancholy."

Had his love for her been less deep, or had it not been based upon those very qualities which he felt were in themselves the stern and unrelenting arbiters of his fate, he might perhaps, on his return, have done what so many others would have done under similar circumstances, made an effort to induce her to change her mind. But how could he do that which he knew could but give her pain; perhaps build up a barrier between them for ever; and—well, there was something within—for love is full of mysterious revelations, which told him it would be useless.

"Surely there is some happiness in knowing that she loves me, and that the hand which I am denied will never be given to another."

He repeated this very often to himself, but he did not find much consolation in it.

He was struggling on, doing the best he could—somewhat badly, it must be confessed—when Victoria left St. Tobias's and returned to Deepdale.

Victoria met him with a frank cordiality, such as she might have shown to any other old and dear friend. Her frank and un-

affected manner did more than anything else to confirm Sir Francis in the opinion that it would be the height of folly to say one word which might have the effect of endangering a friendship he felt might become in time the one great consolation of his life. So he remained silent.

Besides, he felt a little flattered. Was not Victoria's manner the greatest proof she could offer of the sincerity of her affection? Did she not show by it that she felt she could confide in his honour, and rely upon his mastery over himself to spare her every allusion to that one topic upon which his lips, as well as hers, were to be closed for ever? She never could be his wife! True. But he would love her still: love her as a friend—and why should not friendship, which is based upon love, become even more than love?

Poor Sir Francis! Though he had made the round-the-world tour, he does not seem to have mastered all the mysteries of the human heart, or he would have known that of all passions love is the most intractable.

Nourishing, however, this idea, he became, for the time being, quite happy. His whole time was taken up with the execution of some one of his many schemes for the better-

ing of something or somebody, and Victoria —kind, good, clever, and perhaps all the dearer because firm and unrelenting—Victoria was within reach to sympathise and advise.

His time was taken up from morning to night, and yet not a day passed without his riding over to Deepdale—there were so many points upon which he must have advice; and it was a pleasant sight to watch the conference. Sir Francis reporting progress and unfolding his future plans; Victoria calmly listening, and now and again interposing some judicious word. Sir Francis wondering how it was he had not seen things as Victoria saw them; Victoria tempering yet admiring the enthusiastic ardour he brought to bear upon all he did, and in contrast with which her own action was made to seem so cold and tame. He mounting his horse and riding away, his head full of schemes, but his heart more deeply in love than ever; she turning to her books and reading, reading, reading for a while, and then—why does she suddenly close the book and say, "Never! never!"?

Poor Victoria! She had been a year in a hospital; yet she, too, had not found out

that of all diseases love is the most intractable!

"Absent for a week at Nettlestone? Dear me! and I wanted so much to see her." And consult her he does. Once more Sir Francis is to be seen riding up the Nettlestone avenue; he is to be seen riding up it daily; the conferences are longer even than they were before. There was a reason, perhaps, for their being so, for Victoria had found some of the questions propounded by Sir Francis so difficult that she had thought it better to call in the aid of another expert. "Two heads are better than one," she said, laughingly; and so three heads were to be found daily in deep consultation.

"I really hardly know which is the most beautiful," said Sir Francis to himself on the third day, as he rode home.

He was thinking of the two heads, and more particularly at that moment of the one which belonged to——well, no matter; it might have been Victoria or—there would have been no harm in it—the golden locks of Geraldine.

The week flew by. At the earnest request of Lady Arabella—again under the pressure we wot of—the visit of the young people was

prolonged to ten days. Ten days of supreme happiness; ten days pregnant — as what time, indeed, is not?—with much to influence the lives of each and all.

A ride to-day; an excursion on the morrow; a picnic — to which Sir Francis came—to Broadlands Abbey. Lawn-tennis at all hours of the day. In the evenings music: Geraldine and Eva singing together as only sisters can sing; Sir Francis, when there, in ecstasies, and forgetting for the moment all else; Chub, looking melancholy and out of sorts, but cheering up somewhat in the lighter parts, and now and then, when he could catch the air, swinging one great foot backwards and forwards as if to mark the time; Duke and Sis looking at each other across a table, on which chessmen were arranged; Mr. Yorke deep in the arguments by which the Right Hon. Hugh Forrestor sought to show, in a pamphlet of three hundred pages, that the Pope had exceeded his authority in the way in which he had established his infallibility, and so had wounded the tender consciences of many of the faithful. Such a subject could but be deeply interesting to a good Churchman like Mr. Yorke; and he pitied those who pro-

fessed to think that outside the pale of the Roman Church it mattered very little what the Pope said or did.

The pamphlet was evidently a very hard nut to crack, and the kernel either very small or difficult to find; perhaps because, through a wish to preserve it from injury, the Right Hon. Hugh Forrester had surrounded it with a plentiful padding of pungent words, for Mr. Yorke's whole attention appeared to be concentrated upon it.

Lady Arabella reposes upon a couch, arranged at such an angle that had there been no ceiling she might have seen the stars without moving her head.

"When I hear music," she said, "I like to look upward; but it must be good music. When it is—and my children sing so sweetly—then my thoughts are carried away to heaven, and I see angels.'

Once or twice the Rev. St. John Softridge and Mrs. Softridge came to dinner.

"They are suitable people to meet our young friends," remarked Lady Arabella to her husband, "and won't mind it; and indeed, just now there is no one else to ask."

Then there were evenings when Mr. Yorke had called Victoria to him and sat talking

with her with an earnestness and degree of interest very rare with him.

"You have indeed bewitched my husband," said Lady Arabella to her one evening; "he will not condescend to speak to anyone else. Really, if you were not going away so soon I should have to undergo the fatigue of being jealous."

On these occasions, when Sir Francis was there, he was frequently left with Geraldine; and he was surprised to find what a change had taken place in her. She seemed to know so much of subjects on which before she had either professed entire ignorance or a supreme indifference.

"Can I have misunderstood her?" was his first question. The answer came quickly. "No; she is changed. It is Victoria's influence; it is all Victoria!"

So it was that, as an evidence of Victoria's power, of Victoria's work, that Geraldine once more began to take up her old place in Sir Francis's heart.

Once more: "Poor Sir Francis!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"DEAD AT LAST."

THE party at Nettlestone is broken up. Mr. and Mrs. Yorke and their two daughters only remain at the Court, for Duke—who always speaks as if he were overwhelmed with work—has found something to do elsewhere. Deepdale is deserted, for Victoria is on her way, escorted by Dr. and Mrs. Pringle and Sis, to Switzerland; and Chub has gone to London, where he is to study medicine and "walk the hospitals." Sir Francis, too, has gone abroad. He is just now full of the advantages of small holdings and peasant proprietors, and intends to make himself practically acquainted with the subject in France and Belgium.

Geraldine is only reconciled to the dulness of Nettlestone, of which she makes frequent complaints, by her father having promised

her that in another month the house shall be full of visitors, and that this year they will go to London earlier than usual, and that she shall be "presented" and formally introduced; which, it seems, she has not yet been, for Lady Arabella thinks young people should be kept in the background as long as possible.

Each day seemed to go on much as another, and Geraldine was beginning to count the hours when the pheasants—the season is a late one—would be given up to slaughter: when "presto!" as if by the touch of a magician's wand, the whole scene changes, and the daily routine at the Court is completely destroyed.

They were at breakfast—Mr. Yorke, as usual, dividing his attention between his letters, the newspapers, and the buttered toast—when his whole family were thrown into consternation by his suddenly ejaculating:

"Good God! He is dead at last!"

Mr. Mortimer, who had just placed a dish upon the table, immediately assumed an expression befitting so solemn an incident, and crept out of the room more noiselessly than ever. It almost seemed as if he would not—no, not for worlds—have disturbed the peace-

ful slumbers of him who was spoken of as dead.

"He is dead at last!"

"Who—who is dead?"

"Slumberton is dead."

"You don't say so! What, poor old Slumberton dead!"

"Yes; dead at last."

And so there was joy in the house of Yorke. For he whose death was thus announced was no other than the senior member for Middleshire, who had sat—it would be more correct, perhaps, to say had slept—in the House of Commons for the last forty years, and whose tenacious hold upon his seat had so long prevented Mr. Yorke's great desire to enter into Parliamentary life from being realised.

Poor old Slumberton! though he had often talked about resigning, dozing on the benches of the House of Commons during a portion of each year had become so completely a part and parcel of his daily life, that he could never screw his courage up to the point of applying for the Chiltern Hundreds; and so, although his working days had long been past, he died in harness.

He had passed away into the next world,

as he had passed through this, very quietly. "I think I shall have a little sleep; do not let me be disturbed," were his last words. Life had been made so easy to him, that he could not understand what people meant when they spoke of its trials. "People ought to be contented," he used to say. "If I am happy, it is because I am contented. There is no truer saying than that contentment is a perpetual feast." Contentment was his panacea for all ills; his political creed was based upon it. "If people would but let things alone and be content, what a country this would be!" True, as far as the race of Slumbertons is concerned; and the race is very far from being extinct.

Mr. Yorke had thought the time would never come. Now it had arrived.

"He is dead at last!" and Mr. Yorke becomes a candidate for Middleshire.

Lady Arabella is full of it; the girls talk of nothing else; the servants'-hall is turned into a debating society, in which Mr. Mortimer exercises his oratorical powers to his heart's content.

"I have belonged to many parties in my time," said Mr. Mortimer, grandiloquently, "and have heard hafter-dinner speeches from some of the most heminent men on both

sides of the House, but don't talk to me of your Whigs and your Tories, of your Liberals and your Conservatives, of your Radicals and your what-nots. When you know them as I do, they are all alike—the same men under different names, all a-looking out for themselves; a regular case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. Good of the country? Lord bless you! if I go in for politics, the country means *me*, though I don't talk of *me*, but of progress and my party; and if my party is out, and another in, then look out for squalls, for no matter what the Ins may say or do, there's I and all the other Outs ready to be down upon them with arguments like sledge hammers to prove that they are wrong, and that the country is wrong, and that everybody is wrong, who does not belong to our party—that is, agree with me. It is just like dogs—the Ins have got the bone, and the Outs go on a-tugging and a-worrying until they get it from them. And so on and on. There are some little curs, too, who belong to no party, and so can only have a sniff at the bone from a distance; but this makes them so cantankerous, that though they have not the strength or pluck to go in and win, they yelp and yowl more than all the others put together, and

very often end with a free fight amongst themselves. I tell you what, it is in public life just what it is in private life; men will be men, and there is just as much difference between what they do, and what they say, as there is between a piece of chalk and that there cheese. Why, when I first hentered upon the duties of my profession, I haccepted an hengagement with an M.P. who was a regular old political wolf in sheep's clothing. He was all for the people. And to hear him talk! As I stood behind his chair and heard him a-discoursing about liberty and hequality, no taxation, and cheap bread, I never could have believed he was the greatest old bully that ever lived, who treated his family like dogs, and we, who gave him our faithful services, like Roosians or nigger slaves. At the end of three months I terminated our hengagement in disgust. 'No more of your Radical shams,' said I. 'You may be a man and a brother, but may I be spifficated if I am going to be an Habel to such another Cain.' To stop his jaw, they made him a minister—top-sawyer of the works, or something of the sort; and from that day to this, though I have often heard him a-mouthing away at City feasts, he is

never tired of talking of 'responsibility,' and the way he brings out the word is enough to choke you. But that little bit of hexperience did me good—that it did. Had it not been for that, I might have remained a party man; and I repeat it, and I care not who hears me say it, a thorough-going party man is a poor mean thing who does not dare to call his soul his own, but allows himself to be a-whipped here, and a-whipped there, just as— Well, well! there is no use in a-talking more about it; my name is Mortimer, and I am a man. What do I care for party? But I do say this: I do like to see the members of the House a-driving up to it in their own carriages; and it will be a credit to the county to have for its representative the gentleman in whose 'ousehold we have taken hoffice. For it won't be easy, search the country where you will, to find one—I care not if he be a member of the haristocracy or not—with half his money. And I would ask," continued Mr. Mortimer, "what is a man without money? Why, just this"— here Mr. Mortimer turned down his empty glass, with an expression of intense disgust—"but give him money"—Mr. Mortimer pours out a bumper—"and he becomes

like this glass when 'tis full. Where is the man who is not ready to raise it to his lips? No, no; take my word for it, there is nothing like money: 'tis better than brains."

The excitement in Middleshire is intense.

"Have you heard the news?"

"No—what?"

"He is dead at last."

"Who is dead?"

"What! you don't know? Slumberton is dead!"

"Old Slumberton? Indeed, then there is no time to be lost. Yorke must be brought forward."

"Yorke must be opposed. Fitz-King is the man."

"We must do this—we must do that!"

It is like the awakening out of a deep sleep. Middleshire is now wideawake, for Slumberton is dead!

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEER WINS.

MIDDLESHIRE is indeed aroused. There are meetings of the county magnates; electioneering agents start into life like butterflies in the summer sun: Sharpus and Sly, who do all the law-work of the county, put on a cheerful, cheery look, such as they have not had for years; and in all directions' toiling along the county roads are to be seen waggons laden with preparations for the coming fray, in the shape of huge barrels filled with the sustaining and exhilarating beverage prepared by that patriotic and philanthropic firm, Souseman and Soppit.

A contested election at last.

"Hurrah! A real trial of strength! Middleshire is no longer to be under the shadow of a political compromise. No! we will fight it out! We will nail our colours to the mast! No surrender!"

But as the time approaches, an unaccountable fear falls upon the Middleshire electors: there is a vague rumour that Lord Tom FitzKing, the Whig nominee, show symptoms of wavering. There can be no bribery, of course; but it is said that there is a suspicious number of desertions from the Liberal ranks. Lord Tom FitzKing is not rich. Why should he impoverish himself in a hopeless cause? Alas! the rumour is but too true. Lord Tom FitzKing suddenly finds that his health has become so delicate that he is utterly incapacitated from undertaking Parliamentary duties; he puts forward a manifesto to that effect; and is off for the Engadine by the next train.

The whole county is in a state of confusion; the Liberals in a state of collapse; the Conservatives almost as gloomy as if they had suffered a defeat—when, ting, ting! the curtain rises to a new act—and a new actor takes Lord Tom FitzKing's part.

"Good news! Great news! We are to have a fight after all. But he has no chance. He is a dreamer." "He is a good fellow. He is just the man." "No—he is a democrat; he is a socialist." "What are his principles? What does he say?"

He says only this:

"GENTLEMEN,

"In obedience to the request of a numerously signed requisition, I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the vacant seat in the representation of the county."

And he signs himself:

"FRANCIS HAWTHORNE."

Lady Arabella thinks it is unneighbourly; Eva that it is unkind. Geraldine suddenly discovers that she hates politics, and that elections are her peculiar aversion. She retires into private life, and obstinately refuses to leave the house "until all this horrid vulgar fuss is over." She even takes off the blue and orange ribbons she had taken so much trouble to procure. Lady Arabella is angry; but she has no time to spare; she owes every moment of her time to her husband—to her country. She is here, there, and everywhere. She is buying up all the dark-blue and orange in the county. She has kissed so many babies that she says she cannot get the horrid smell of babies out of her nose. She shakes great rough hands till her own aches. She tells everybody who has a vote that Mr. Yorke is his best friend. She no longer complains of

being *éreintée*, and sits bolt upright in her carriage, without cushions. Everybody is charmed with her kindness and condescension.

As for Mr. Yorke, he was not idle. He, too, is driving all over the county, from one committee-room to another; and the whole county has become one mass of committee-rooms. There is hardly a public-house that has not a great printed placard with "Central," or "District," or "Sub-committee Room" stuck up in its windows, with an address from Mr. Yorke underneath, in which, in eloquent terms, he refers to our glorious Queen; to our imperishable constitution; to the rights of property; to the duties of Churchmen; to liberty of conscience; to the claims of the agricultural interests; to the malt-tax and cheap beer. There is no Cerberus in the shape of a county voter to whom he does not throw a sop. But he is not content with this. Wherever he finds a room large enough, he speaks in it; wherever there is a balcony he speaks from it—he has bought up so many bronchial troches that they have become scarce, and he has sucked more oranges in a few days than he had sucked before in his whole life. No doubt he was

right in this. Electors do not care for dumb candidates — there is no satisfaction in a man who cannot talk. It is not everyone who has time to read speeches; but most people like to hear them when they are likely to contain flattering allusions to themselves.

Mr. Yorke was not a speaker likely to attract much attention within the House; but as a stump orator seeking to obtain the suffrages of a mixed community he certainly knew what he was about, for he never spoke as if he possessed any special knowledge himself, but simply as if he had been allowed to hold a brief for those who had been so kind as to favour him with their opinions; and he had the art of making it appear that he was speaking for, and not to, those he was addressing.

He was what might be called a very safe speaker, for he dealt in platitudes and well-worn truths to such an extent that it was almost as difficult to criticise as to contradict him.

"Aye, how well he do talk! He be a real farmer's friend."

"None of your nonsense about disestablishment. He takes just my views of the Church. Every sound Churchman should rally round him."

"He don't say much for Dissent; but then there's no humbug about him; and he spends more money in my shop than the whole boiling of Salem Chapel put together."

"Yes, yes; it is what I have always said—take off the malt-tax, and there will be no more talk about drunkenness. The people would then be able to get really cheap beer; for there would be no excuse for its not being good, and then we should get rid of this radical teetotalism, which is only rank socialism in disguise."

"I like to hear him talk; he puts things so clear like. He knows what he is about; he would not be the rich man that he is, if he didn't."

Of course he was asked questions, and some of them to ordinary men might have been considered posers. But Mr. Yorke, not being an ordinary man, always had his answer ready—an answer so admirably framed, that it suited all parties equally well; the oracles of Delphi could not have been more craftily contrived.

Of course there was no bribery. Mr. Yorke, as a good Churchman, would have been the last man in the world to have sanctioned such a proceeding; besides, he felt that, rich man

as he was, the expenses of a contested election in a county were quite heavy enough as they were. Committee-rooms had to be paid for. The time of those voters—and they were legion—who were employed as messengers and agents, suddenly became of great value; and all the world seemed to have lost the power of walking, judging from the number of vehicles which had to be placed at its disposal. Then came looming in the distance that voluminous document which would be sure to end with a line of four figures, just above the signatures of Sharpus and Sly.

No, Mr. Yorke was a strictly conscientious man; he would not bribe.

And then he was almost certain of success.

"They keep it dark," said Mr. Mortimer, "but they know as well as I do they are running the wrong horse. The baronet is a good un enough to go, but he is ticklish to handle, and given to bolt."

The fact was, the amiable country gentlemen of Liberal proclivities, who had signed the requisition to Sir Francis and formed his committee, were in despair. He had put forward an address, without having consulted them upon it, which they were unanimous in characterising as "most objectionable;" and

afterwards, instead of having endeavoured to remove any injurious impressions this injudicious address might have created by explanations which would have placed his views before those who had been shocked by them in a somewhat different light, he had insisted upon retaining it intact, and of referring to it on every occasion as the exact expression of his political convictions. Not content with this, he was given to answering questions with a candid recklessness which set all the rules of political reticence at defiance.

"What is to be done with such a man?" asked the Chairman of the Liberal Committee, Mr. Thomas Freeman. "He shocks everybody; he is always putting the truth before the public as naked as my hand; he wants prudence. Look at all our great public men. See how they dress up facts. It is too bad; no man can hope to be at the head of the poll who acts as he does."

No, indeed! no man could. His address was as bad as bad could be. It offended everybody. Mr. Mortimer was quite right—the Liberals were running the wrong horse.

For what could be hoped from a candidate who declared that he would not spend a

penny beyond what was absolutely necessary and legitimate ; that he wanted neither committee-rooms nor messengers; and who had answered, when asked how his supporters were to get to the poll, "On their legs."

Give and Take, the Liberal lawyers, pronounced him to be utterly impracticable.

"We knew that he was a gentleman of advanced opinions, but we thought he would have had a greater regard to his interests than to act in this wild manner."

Then he was so candid !

He was so anxious that people should know what he meant, that he left them no loophole to creep out of.

"Do you really mean that you approve of manhood suffrage ?"

"Yes, under certain conditions. It is the only means of elevating the masses."

"And let women have votes ?"

"Decidedly, with certain restrictions ; under the same conditions as the men."

"And seats in Parliament ?"

"Assuredly, if the constituency preferred to have a woman for their member."

"May I be allowed to ask a question ? Would you interfere with capital ?"

"Certainly, in all cases where interference might be needed."

"You forget, sir, capital is like water; it will always find its own level."

"Very true," said Sir Francis. "So true, that I would wish no better simile; and what does water do when it is left to find its own level? Simply this—it turns plains into swamps, or passing by large tracts leaves them deserts. And so it remains, till man comes in to irrigate the desert and to drain the swamp. The tendency of capital is in like manner to accumulate unduly in a few hands, so that large numbers of the community are left destitute; and it then becomes the duty of those upon whom the regulation of society has devolved to devise means to check this tendency as far as possible, and to promote schemes for its greater distribution."

"It seems to me, then, that you would interfere with the rights of property."

"I deny that property has only rights—it has equally its duties."

"Would you not allow me to do as I please with my own?"

"Only so far as you might do so without injury to others."

"I don't quite understand. Let me put it more clearly. I am the owner of a great estate, and my individual idiosyncrasy makes me place all my happiness on my farms being left unlet, the ground untilled; tell me, sir, would you oblige me to cultivate it?"

"Before *I* answer your question, let me ask *you* one? I am the owner of the county of Northumberland, and my especial idiosyncrasy makes me base all my happiness upon its being kept waste; would that be any justification for my being allowed to do that which would be so manifestly injurious to others?"

"Of course not—the question is absurd; that is stating an extreme case. You doctrinaires always deal with extreme cases."

"Allow me, however, to ask what would be the difference, as regards the public weal, between one man allowing the county of Northumberland to remain waste, and a thousand men allowing an area equal in extent to the county of Northumberland to remain so?"

"Then, sir, you would divide properties. What would become of our great families?"

"It would simply be the replacing of *one* very rich family by *many* tolerably rich

ones. Younger sons, being men of average energy and ability, having capital to work with, would be able to found fresh fortunes. And many nice girls, who are now doomed to lead a life of poverty and single blessedness, would be able to marry men of their choice. So that you would have thousands of useful centres where you have only hundreds now. Besides, there would be another advantage."

"Pray, sir, what is it?"

"There would not be so many younger sons to be provided for; and then, and not till then, dare we hope to see a reduction in our public expenditure."

"But, as regards the House of Peers, surely you will allow that some of our greatest statesmen have been peers?"

"Undoubtedly; and such men would probably be found either in the House of Commons or in the Senate. But is it not humiliating to know that, as things are, a born idiot — provided he has a sufficient modicum of brains to prevent his being qualified for an asylum, and not one atom more—has a place in the legislature which gives him the same weight, as regards his vote, as the ablest man of his time, who may

have earned his peerage by a lifelong devotion to the consideration of economic questions and to the performance of important official duties in the service of the State?"

"Oh, Sir Francis, Sir Francis!"

"And this beer question? Is it true, as I have heard, that you would confiscate the property of brewers?"

"I would do nothing of the kind. I would simply turn fiction into fact, and give a *bonâ fide* license—not to the house, but to the individual whose name is written upon it, to terminate with his withdrawal from business. Nominally it is so now; but our laws are so ingeniously framed by the interested individuals who have the making of them, that in reality the great mass of the licenses are in the hands of a few capitalists."

"What would you effect by this change?"

"Greater freedom of action as regards those upon whom the granting of licenses devolves, and an enormous reduction in the number of gin-palaces and public-houses; for the greater number of them would not exist a moment were they not owned by capitalist brewers and distillers."

"But surely the brewers could make ad-

vances to the publicans, so that the results would be the same ?"

"Not at all. The brewers might make advances, it is true, but if they did, they would have no security for their money."

"Of course, sir, you would be in favour of compensation ?"

"Compensation ! May I ask for what ? Because a number of capitalists have made enormous fortunes out of the public by the advantages obtained from a monopoly for which they have paid comparatively next to nothing, they are to receive — when it is found necessary for the benefit of public morality that this monopoly should be abolished—a large sum of money, either in lieu of fortunes yet unmade, or as a set-off against the depreciation of a property the value of which had nothing but monopoly and the continuance of monopoly for its basis. Really, sir, this is too absurd ! The value of commodities, of shares, of stocks, of land, of everything you may be pleased to name, is being altered every day by a variety of causes —very frequently by the action of Government and by legislative enactments ; yet who ever talks of compensation ? No, my dear sir ; it will not do ; the brewers have been putting

their hands into the poor man's pocket quite long enough; and I suspect they will not find themselves penniless when they are obliged for the future to keep them in their own."

Sir Francis had gradually become excited, and his audience could hardly be expected to remain calm. If he had had for his object the alienation of the great majority of the voters he could not have taken a better line. The landowners looked upon him as so dangerous that the word Communist was not strong enough for him; every man who could lay claim to being a capitalist shrunk from him in dismay. The clergy regarded him with intense dislike; the Dissenters with suspicion; even the philanthropists, who might have been expected to have been on his side, were against him.

To their questions on many subjects his answers had been favourable. They had loudly applauded when he declared that it was the duty of all governments to look after the poor, and see that those necessary things were done for them which they were unable to do for themselves. Yes; they had even cheered him, but more faintly, when he said:

"Much of the misery and degradation

which is to be found amongst the poorer classes in modern society is due to the manner in which the rich have neglected their duties. For the poor must be helped—not by charity, which, taken in the aggregate, is nothing but an easy method for soothing the consciences of those who might otherwise be made to feel uneasy when forced to recognise the misery proceeding from their neglect—but by taking care that out of their abundance those who are in themselves helpless should be provided with all those necessaries, without which life becomes brutalised and society endangered. And if this cannot be done, or is not done, by individual effort, then it becomes the duty of the State to step in and see that full justice be done to all. For instance, air and light and water and shelter are primary necessaries; but how can the poor man obtain them unless they are provided for him by others? He cannot build a house, so he must put up with what he can get, perhaps with one that is small, overcrowded, ill-lighted, badly drained, that has no ventilation, and a water-supply which would mean slow poisoning were he not addicted to other means for slaking his thirst; and yet look at our overcrowded villages and

the squalid meanness of the poorer quarters in many of our towns, and ask yourselves whether there are no rich men whose duty it is, by a co-operative effort, to come to the rescue. (Sensation.) I will not deny that much has been done; but it has generally been done in a perfunctory, spasmodic manner. If it were not so, should we still find so many myriads of the industrious poor crowded together in reeking courts and alleys, or having no other shelter than that afforded them each night, for a few pence, in a common lodging-house? Or think you, if this principle were better understood, that a rich town like Liverpool would have spent a third of a million of money on a 'people's park' before some better provision had been made for housing the industrious dock labourers than the filthy quarters they are compelled to live in, with a whisky-shop at every corner? Why, positively, they might have done all that was needed, instead of making the park, and have got five per cent. for their money into the bargain; but then they would have had no monument in proof of their munificence—and corporations, just like individuals, like to have something to show for their money, something that people

may point to and say: 'Just look and see what has been done.' This is why, whilst people are still to be found dying in our streets from destitution, there is no lack of money wherewith to build big churches with tall spires."

Now the bump of benevolence may be very largely developed, but most people have other bumps as well; hence it was that Sir Francis's philanthropic friends did not quite like the kind of cap he was fitting on their benevolent heads. Then, too, it is bad enough to be preached *at* from the pulpit, but it is still worse to be preached *to* by anyone out of it. They did not like his treatment of the subject, so they changed it.

Some of them had long since given up as hopeless the question of suffering humanity, and transferred all their sympathies to suffering "animality." Just as many good men and women, despairing, as it would seem, of being able to make any impression on the ignorance and vice of the masses at home, devote all their time, or their money, or their energies, to the reformation of some amiable man-eating race abroad.

Hence it was that Mr. Placidus Simkinson, a member, indeed vice-president, of many

benevolent associations, and chairman of the lately-formed Cheap Cats'-meat Company, and who—perhaps it was out of respect for the offices he held—always appeared in public in a white tie and black kid gloves, felt that the time had arrived when Sir Francis should be called upon to declare himself upon what Mr. Simkinson characterised as "one of those vital points which has been so insidiously touched upon by science, and which, perhaps more than any other, requires the intervention of the legislature, in order to prevent those humane instincts being perverted and destroyed, without which the whole social structure can be said to have no firm foundation."

"I would, sir, on my own part, and in behalf of many of my friends, ask what are your views on vivisection?"

"Vivisection!" said Sir Francis; "why, really, gentlemen, you are questioning me on a subject with regard to which I must confess to knowing very little. Indeed, I do not care to know much, for I regard it simply as a detail; and I always prefer, when I can, dealing with principles. I believe in connection with vivisection some horrible cases of cruelty have been cited which every

humane and reasonable man must condemn ; but we must never allow ourselves to confound the abuse with the use : and it is quite possible that within certain limits the practice of vivisection may not only be justifiable, but necessary. I beg you to remark I only say possible, for I have not as yet had time to enter fully into the matter. But this I do know," said Sir Francis, emphatically, "that of all the rank impostures in this world of sham, there can be none greater than the horror professed by many men with regard to this practice, who are themselves habituallly guilty of the greatest cruelties to the lower creatures ; and this without even a pretence of furthering scientific truth, or of acting for the benefit of others, but simply and wholly for their own selfish pleasure and amusement. I speak, sir, of those who hunt and shoot and fish ; and I ask you, gentlemen, whether it is in an assembly in which a large proportion of the members are sportsmen, that such a question can be dealt with without the grossest hypocrisy ? For what man can lay claim to a just perception of what is right or wrong in such a matter whose chief delight is to play a salmon, hunt a fox or hare, and show his skill as a shot by shooting at

pigeons? Not that I think all sport is criminal; that opens out another question. But I cannot help sometimes asking myself whether directing the moral forces of the country upon these comparatively minor matters does not do injury, from its diverting the public mind from the major ones."

Mr. Placidus Simkinson was not satisfied.

"Sir," he said angrily, "I find—and my friends are of the same opinion—that your answer is highly unsatisfactory; and I do not see how it is possible for us to support a gentleman who can speak so lightly of such an outrage on humanity as vivisection, and who holds in so little esteem the labours of some of the best of men—aye, and of women—who have devoted themselves to this great cause."

"I am very sorry," said Sir Francis, "if I should have been misunderstood, for no man honours more than I do those who are really workers in a noble cause."

Too late; too late! The philanthropists, led by Mr. Placidus Simkinson, become Conservatives for the nonce, and vote for the Conservative candidate to a man.

Ah, Sir Francis, Sir Francis! It is indeed too late. What can possibly be done with such a man?

Even his old friend Dr. Pringle looked grave. He had thrown himself into the fray with even more than his usual energy; but go where he might, he was sure to find that something had been said or done by Sir Francis which had done far more injury to his own cause than to that of his opponent. It is true that most of the opinions which Sir Francis had put forth were equally professed by him; but there is a time for all things. Virtues may be carried so far that they may do as much harm as vices.

"My dear friend," he wrote to Sir Francis, "you have made a sad mistake. The great bulk of those who are pleased to call themselves Liberals are totally unprepared to accept many of the principles which are so dear to us both, and your frank profession of them has done much to injure the cause all real lovers of progress have so much at heart. If you would succeed in educating the public mind you must seek to be practical, and confine your efforts within the limits of the possible. The Anglo-Saxon race, as a whole, detests change, unless it commends itself by some prospect of immediate and certain advantage; and new ideas are never acceptable—indeed, there is no place for them until the preju-

dices upon which all our habits and convictions are formed have been undermined by those secret, silent, and slow, but sure, processes through which time works out such marvellous results. That is why those men have succeeded best as reformers who have confined themselves to dealing with one thing at a time, and have taken care that in dealing with that one thing they have not been too far ahead of the wants and wishes of those they sought to benefit. For, believe me, the most undeniable truths will always reveal themselves as truths to the few long before they will be accepted as even worthy of attention by the many; you must not, therefore, force truth down people's throats like physic. They will spue it up if you do."

"If the electors don't like me and my principles, there is Mr. Yorke," said Sir Francis.

The electors did not like Sir Francis and his principles, so Mr. Yorke became the man of their choice. He was returned with an overwhelming majority, and the Liberal interest in Middleshire had received a crushing defeat.

"All through Sir Francis and his uncompromising candour. Confound it, sir! better

put up a man who cannot speak at all, than a fellow who will shout out everything, and does not know when to shut his mouth. No wonder that beer has won!"

END OF VOL. I.

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